

Louisiana State University LSU Digital Commons

LSU Master's Theses

Graduate School

2017

The Treasure of Welks-Kreer

Lance Rasmussen

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, lcrasmus@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses



Part of the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rasmussen, Lance, "The Treasure of Welks-Kreer" (2017). *LSU Master's Theses*. 4473.
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/4473

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master's Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.

THE TRESURE OF WELKS-KREER

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Theatre

by
Lance Carl Rasmussen
B.F.A., Utah State University, 2016
May 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the faculty and administration of the School of Theater at LSU, Stacey Cabaj, Sydnee Fullmer, Melody Rasmussen, Glenn Underwood, Tyler Whitesides, Travis Barrus, Rock Lim, Brady Campbell, The Employees and Crew at Toad and Tricycles, Amy Rasmussen, Craig Jessop, Leslie Brott, Richie Call, and the Caine College of the Arts at Utah State University.

ABSTRACT

This document is intended to document the process, from inception, through creation, presentation and finally reflections on of *The Treasure of Welks Kreer*, a solo performance show written by Lance Rasmussen in fulfillment of the requirement for his Master's degree at Louisiana State University.

Harkening back to the memories of his childhood and his current passions and interests, Lance wrote *The Treasure of Welks Kreer* as a story of hope and exploration. The story follows The Metaphor, a superhero who finds himself transported back to the basement where he used to play table-top roleplaying games with the group of friends who eventually formed his team of superheroes. Through replaying the roleplaying game he loved as a teen, he is forced to confront truths and what it means to take on the mantle of a hero.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2. CREATION	4
CHAPTER 3. SCRIPTS, PERFORMANCES, RECEPTION, AND FEEDBACK	25
3.1 In-Process Draft	26
3.2 Final Draft	42
3.3 Performance, Reception and Feedback.....	58
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION	68
REFERENCES	73
APPENDECIS	74
Appendix A: Essay/Experimental Super Hero Monologue from Summer 2016	74
Appendix B: Love letter/Experimental Monologue from Summer 2016	83
Appendix C: Essay/Experimental Monologue on Hope from Summer 2016	87
Appendix D: Notes from Power of Positive Partying Tour by Andrew W.K.	90
Appendix E: Lyrics to <i>The Unicorn Invasion of Dundee</i>	96
Appendix F: Lyrics from <i>Victory Strikes Again</i> and <i>Long Live the Party</i>	98
VITA	101

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCCION

In life, I have a particular governing principle that has served me quite well. I constantly ask myself “Where’s the hope?” In any situation that arises, in any number of choices I may have, I do my utmost to ask myself that, find the option that yields the most hope, and chose it. Generally, the concept of hope is tied to happiness; a measure of fulfillment and joy that comes from something not yet known, performed, or received.

When told that the capstone project for my MFA in acting at LSU was a solo performance of my own creation, I instantly thought of the project that would bring me the most joy, the most fulfillment, that would be my own “dream project.” My mind instantly sprang to the idea of playing a superhero, something that I had never had the opportunity to do previously, and something that I have little hope of actually being able to do within my career. While the film world is quite saturated with them at the moment, the chances of gaining the reputation and clout to land one of those roles are very, very slim. There’s hope, yes, but I’d be foolish to simply bank on that as my go-to option. Even worse, there’s not a great deal of plays which have characters with superpowers, let alone ones clearly defined as the traditional superhero. From a logistical standpoint, the supernatural doesn’t translate onto stage very well without a fairly large effects budget and a lot of hands on deck to make things happen, both of which I was made aware would be unavailable to me during my performances here. All this to say, my opportunities to play a superhero are limited, so I might as well forge my own chance at it through creating my own work.

Fortunately, this immediate impulse had a wide reservoir of experience and knowledge just waiting to be tapped. In retrospect, I believe one of my best choices in selecting the topic and nature of my thesis was picking something that brought me joy every time I got to work on it. If I ever got stuck, or frustrated, or overwhelmed in the massive amount of information that I was

processing, all that was needed was a quick call to one of the friends with whom I had spent so many hours in Mystic Comics, our local comic and game store during my teenage years. I could watch a movie, read a graphic novel or book, play a game. This tie to bringing something so completely *me* to the stage was a saving grace through the whole process.

As I was aware, and continued to learn on deeper levels through my training at LSU, one of the prevailing purposes of art and theater is the ability to take others on a journey through the experiences of being alive. Our feelings, our sensory abilities and emotions, combine to give us a feeling of consciousness and life. Through acting, we get to inspire others to discover new things about life and existence through those means. It's not a responsibility to be taken lightly.

It wasn't enough, then, to simply tell the cool story of a hero. Instead, I quickly realized that I had a responsibility to portray something that was something more than just mere entertainment. In thinking about what sort of "story" I wanted to tell, what "message" I would want to leave an audience with, many things came to mind, but often seemed cliché or forced. However, my moment of clarity in the process came from analyzing why I had selected my subject matter, and realizing it's because I followed the governing life philosophy I espoused above. Realizing that I had the opportunity to and gift to even be able to *hope* made me want rather desperately to share that. It has always been an inner drive for me, spreading and making sure that everyone can see the positive side of existence. With that in mind, I set out to write and perform a piece in which I could perform a role I hoped for, and spread hope to others by doing so.

This thesis documents the conception, development, research, writing, rehearsal, performance, and reflection upon *The Treasure of Welks-Kreer*, the eventual title for my solo performance piece. Chapter One will cover the creation process, including further investigating

the inception, motivation, and moments surrounding all points prior to the performances, including researching, writing, and rehearsals. Chapter Two includes two annotated drafts of my script, one from the middle of the process, and the final performance draft. Chapter Three covers the performances themselves, and the feedback and response from my peers, advisors, faculty, and others who saw the performances.

CHAPTER 2. CREATION

The assignment for this project was originally introduced to me as part of my recruitment to LSU. I started to float ideas around at that point. The task was new to me, as I had written very little for stage in my life, and never anything that had actually been produced. This was also my first foray into the world of solo performance. With that in mind, I began to pull out inspirations from various points in my life to try and combined into a piece which I would find both meaningful and poignant.

With that in mind, this chapter will outline my process of conceptualizing, researching and writing my piece. While it will not in any way be completely comprehensive, I intend to highlight many of the significant moments and breakthroughs that happened in my process. This will work in primarily a chronological methodology, though will vary at times to allow for specific exploration on a topical level. The chapter will catalogue my progress from initial conception and development, through writing, consulting and drafting the piece, workshopping on its feet, and will end with the rehearsal and preparation period for the performances themselves.

The instant struggle of attempting a solo performance piece is the inherent challenge of a piece of theater in which you only have yourself on stage. So much of my previous training, and the majority of my training in graduate school has had an extended focus on what is happening “over there”, meaning within the others with whom you are interacting on the stage. Removing that influence makes an incredibly difficult task, especially within the world I was attempting to build. Heroes have villains. Heroes have sidekicks. But how does one approach a story that might include those elements with just a single player on stage?

It didn't take long for me to grow a bit of distaste for a rapid switch between two characters on opposite sides of justice. While I floated the idea of having both a hero and a villain duel on the stage, my physical restrictions would have required this to be more of battle of words than a clash of super powers. Having to rotate between two characters as they levy threats about what they *could* do to each other just didn't seem appealing to me. So quickly, it became clear that there was going to need to be a different crisis than solving the traditional problem of the world being in peril.

Fortunately, pulling from my fairly regular musings about creating interesting pieces of theater, I had been thinking for quite some time about the idea of watching a piece of theater with a person stuck in a basement. This idea was based on a complete setup of a room, and the idea that you could, potentially, have the entirety of a play with incredibly limited dialogue while observing someone try to escape from a prison in which they find themselves. This idea of a purgatory proved to be an initial key to unlocking the final form that my piece would assume.

Upon realizing that I could combine these ideas, I instantly moved to the idea of having a hero trapped in a purgatory type setting, which would need to be escaped from in some way. While it would not solve my ongoing issue of interaction, it immediately solved my problem of not feeling like I could represent a world crisis.

At this point in time, I also came to the eventual name of my hero, as well as his initial form and powers. Early in the process, I was dedicated to the idea of using this story to convey a message of positivity and hope. The entire concept was an extended metaphor; a phrase I use quite often in my personal life. The more I mulled over what I would want my hero to do, the more I wanted to somehow tie in this idea of relatability and the story within a story. I wanted to utilize a very blatant comparison between my character's journey and the journey that existence

requires of all of us. As I grew more and more attached to this idea, I had a small epiphany moment of simply naming my character “The Metaphor.” I was able at that point to link the power set to the common rhetorical strategy of making a comparison between two different concepts. This allowed for a transition into an initial power set that would fit the name. As I researched a bit in the realm of how writers in the past have come up with the powers and limitations of their heroes, I realized that I had stumbled onto one of the major paths by which writers have created their stories in the past. The choice of metaphor as the root also allowed for a reference to the recently accepted term of *metahuman*, meaning a human being who has abilities or powers above and beyond the normal human population.

As I mulled those facts, my mind went back to my personal history of playing tabletop role-playing games with a group of friends in Logan, Utah, my childhood home. One of my favorite game systems we used was called *Blood of Heroes*, a superhero based campaign that has an extensive character and power creation system. One of my favorite powers I remember encountering was the ability to copy powers from others. Traditionally this had been accomplished via characters such as Rouge in Marvel’s *X-Men* series, who are able to steal the powers of others and utilize them themselves. However, as I thought over this specific power, I realized that there didn’t need to be a process of stealing. In order to fulfill the term “Metaphor” I adapted this to be a process of copying powers, while allowing the one who initially had them to retain their use of them.

As any superhero of note also has a weakness, I also preliminarily programmed the idea of The Metaphor being able to copy powers, but in doing so he also borrows memories, feelings, and experiences. This specific and programmed weakness was intended to provide a

programmed means by which I might be able to explore the idea of immediate relation to and understanding of the experiences of others.

As summer progressed, we began receiving assignments to spur on our processes and prime the intellectual pumps a bit. With that in mind, my next step became to try and get ideas down on paper. As I thought about how to approach the actual plot of my piece, I began pulling from three separate threads within my pot of previous experiences. After struggling to give them form, I decided for my initial report and submission to simply get three different channels of thought down on paper. Instead of trying to put together a piece in which I wasn't yet sure of the form, I wanted to write inspiration down that would influence the actual story and flow of my characters, and would thereby begin to mandate the eventual form the piece would take. The pieces varied in topic and style; one being a philosophical look about the idea of hope and positivity, one being about a relationship which was trying to be salvaged, the final being a monologue-esque take on a superhero trying to justify himself as a hero. All of these were ideas I wanted to explore individually at some point, and decided at this point to see if I couldn't combine them in some form into a larger and more meaningful piece. The pieces are can be found within Appendices A, B and C at the end of this paper.

As I began to mull over how to combine these three incredibly different threads into some sort of coherent tapestry, an opportunity came up for me to be able to attend a speaking tour for one of my great inspirations within the artistic world. Andrew W.K., a singer, songwriter, performing artist, motivational speaker, and "King of Partying" announced a fifty-state tour, calling it his Power of Positive Partying tour. This tour would be a very different take than his traditional musical touring, in that the events would comprise of him at a podium

speaking extemporaneously about life, and taking questions and thoughts from the audience before commenting on them from his unique and poignant philosophical viewpoint.

Mr. W.K. provided the inspiration for one of my three previously mentioned story lines, and given the opportunity to attend his tour and get a personal and in-depth take on his specific ideals, I was able to find two different times in which I was able to attend his tour, once in Las Vegas, Nevada on the 13th of October, and the other here in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on Halloween, October 31st. Both events were poignant, meaningful, and provided a great deal of inspiration for life, and I walked away with a great deal of content that I was able to include in my piece. He spoke specifically in both instances about the inherent goodness of existence, justifying it by saying that if we didn't exist we wouldn't be able to experience anything. He then takes this idea to his own philosophical idea of "partying," or, to put it in his own words, "a simple word describing the physical expression of a state mind in which you're deeply aware of how incredible it is to exist." (W.K.) While his definition of partying is constantly evolving and being refined, the core belief remains the same, and was something I wanted to be a central tenet within my piece. I did decide, however, not to use the phrase "partying," electing instead to focus on the philosophy and application of the term, allowing myself to create my world without simply echoing Mr. W.K.'s exact philosophies. My extensive notes from his presentations are included in the Appendix D.

As a note, I also took a great deal of design choices from Andrew W.K., who appears in his performances and life in an all-white outfit, though generally used and rather dirty. On his album cover for his 2001 album *I Get Wet*, he's photographed with an extensive bloody nose, spilling onto his white shirt. I took this idea and used it as the eventual color palate for the

costume for The Metaphor, as well as drawing from it for design choices in the way that they symbol and mask were created.

It was also at the time I discovered that Mr. W.K. was touring that I had another wonderful moment of discovery that lead to the final form of my piece. Returning to my personal roots, and to the impetus of my character's powers, I began toying with the idea of somehow weaving tabletop roleplaying in my story. At this same point, the series *Stranger Things* was released, with a plot that followed several young people as they lived a life adventure that mirrored their experience during a game of *Dungeons and Dragons (D&D)*. As I watched the show itself, as well as the reaction and response of many people around me, as well as the world, I realized that it was incredibly possible for me to weave this into my narrative. The question immediately came into my mind "What would happen if the kids who played *D&D* became a team of superheroes later in life?" That specific question fed the entirety of my eventual story and piece, and was the keystone of my creative process.

The idea of including something so niche and specific was somewhat daunting at first, as instantly I was faced with the issue of having a specific target audience which would be able to understand every level of action that was happening on the stage. Realizing that most those watching my show in all likelihood would have had almost no experience with the game meant that I was already giving myself a pretty giant hurdle to try to overcome. It came up in several drafts of my piece, as I frequently had to return to my script to simplify and make my terms more accessible; moving past using "mindflayers" and "psionic attacks" to a more accessible "demon lord", changing off spells such as "Melf's Acid Arrow" and "Magic Missile" to a more accessible "Lightning Bolt," choosing elves, humans, and dwarves instead of Tieflings and Dragonborn.

These differences were difficult, but incredibly useful. Primarily, however, I wanted to make sure if I was using the game on stage that I was doing so in the most accurate way I possibly could. I brought in a few friends as consultants and experts on the subject, and took several weeks of working on the specifics of the characters that would be played by the group of friends in my script. I was as accurate as I could be, from the mathematical calculations of the amount of hit points each character had, to the spells and equipment each character had, even though very few of them were actually used in the play itself. This sense of authenticity and an awareness that the world I was stepping into was full and complete proved incredibly useful within the creation, but especially within the acting of the piece.

Once the decision to include D&D as a major element of the play was reached, the next step of the process was an easy one, which was deciding that if you've got a group of friends who all become super heroes, you have to have them within the script in some way. Working on just the plot level, this allowed me to have an established outside relationship from which I could pull inspiration and story, giving depth and history to my world. As D&D is a social game by nature, it immediately required the influence of other characters beyond my protagonist in order to sustain its narrative.

One of the additional challenges which I encountered was how to ensure that my piece lent itself as much as possible to my success in acting it. One of the greatest successes I had found in during my graduate school experience was during a semester class in which we studied the Meisner Technique of acting. This technique, among other concepts, heavily emphasizes the reality of doing. This means not faking things; not pretending. If there is something you need to *do*, and activity to be accomplished on stage, you should actually *do* that activity. It's about reacting to your environment truthfully, and working off of natural impulses rather than a

manufactured series of choreography and line delivery. The class we were involved in was heavily based in bringing various activities into the room; physical tasks which needed to be accomplished. The technique then works to fill those activities with meaning, filling the scenarios with imaginary circumstances which endow the activities with life. This specific technique resonated very much with me during that class, and it was a logical transition for me to try to weave a lot of the successes I found within that class into my work on my solo project.

This was another clear advantage to using Dungeons and Dragons as a base for my project. The game requires an immense amount of minute detail and physical action. There are *things* to be done; moving characters on a board, to rolling dice, looking up rules, checking numbers on sheets, doing mathematical calculations. The game in and of itself is very much a giant Meisner activity, especially if one is needing to accomplish the entirety of the game on one's own. I found that rooting myself within that specific training method and working with that as my focus both in writing and performance provided an anchoring effect that allowed me to find a familiarity and truthfulness in my performances. With that in mind, I set out to write my piece as I had learned to approach my Meisner activities; very specific physical things to do, and deepening meaning with every time I went back to the script and performance. As I continued to write and revise, every change I made could, in part, be traced back to the idea of being more specific for myself, or deepening my personal meaning and connection to what I was saying and doing.

It was at this point, the end of summer and the beginning of our fall semester and classes, that I encountered the next issue of my superhero narrative. As I began discussing the inception of my idea with my classmates and professors, my feedback always went towards a very stereotypical superhero story. Everything I was hearing began with something like “When you’re

trying to save the world...” and “When you’re fighting your villain...” While encouraging that people were buying in with my theme and subject matter, I was a bit surprised by how much these specific ideas didn’t appeal to me. One of the goals I came up with for my play was to try and make a hero that was relatable to the audience. I wanted to move away from two people with insane power or wealth fighting each other with the fate of the world on the line. Instead, I wanted to have a hero who was recognizable, relatable, and personal for an audience. This instinctual push back to the “fight the villain” narrative forced me to rethink exactly what my conflict was going to be, and what I was going to have my character fighting against.

As I continued to mull this over, I realized that there was an immediate tie in possible with several of the elements that I had left floating around in my list of possibilities. Merging the team of friends turned superheroes with my previously discussed idea of a purgatorial space, and adding in the romantic relationship talked about in my summer essays, I realized that I could change the “end of the world” superhero narrative to an intervention story in which a former friend and member of the team returned to try and help the Metaphor through a crisis of self.

So began my actual physical drafting process, as I worked on getting the basic form of the concept on paper. The first few pages flowed very quickly, working with the aforementioned specificity within the game. The plot fell into place very quickly. A group of superheroes were suddenly attacked by citizens of the city they were saving. This attack, apparently, is fueled by a deep resentment and misunderstanding of the heroes’ actual purpose and motivations, as well as the collateral damage which they may have caused. While the rest of the team is defeated and brought into custody, one of the heroes, The Metaphor, manages to escape, fleeing and going into hiding. As he is moving from place to place hiding, he is transported to a room from his childhood by a teammate, initially named Jay, who had left the team at some point. Jay’s name

was later changed to Rose for clarification and specificity of her gender. With her psychic and reality bending powers, she tries to help him through the crisis of faith he's having within his purpose as a friend, a meta-human, and a hero.

These details flowed fairly quickly, and I can't give any sort of specific moments or reference around when they happened or what inspired them specifically. It was a great deal of me simply sitting at the keyboard and writing, following the immediate creativity of the writing process. The choice to have a friend in charge of the purgatory in which The Metaphor finds himself yielded another challenge though, which was how to allow them to communicate. Again, it wasn't appealing to me to have myself switch between these two characters physically on stage, but I also had to have some way to establish exactly what my conflict was going to be. Having my hero show up in a room he couldn't get out of and then talk about how he'd become trapped there by this unseen force he never actually directly interacts with seemed simplistic and boring. Instead, I decided to try and find some way for interaction to happen between my character and his overseer. While direct dialogue wasn't going to be the answer, I did realize that I had some theatrical elements that could be imposed in order to provide a base level of communication.

That decision gave me the bare minimum I would need to move a story along. It allowed me to have a main character that was forced to find the step-by-step strategies by which he would be released from his situation, without having to have direct contact or needed dialogue. It would be a stumbling, messy process, but the idea of a step-by-step discovery of the solution was an incredibly drawing idea for me.

With that in mind, I instantly moved to several key theatrical elements to help facilitate that communication. Giving Rose power over the world allowed me to utilize both sound and

light as an immediate response to the inquiries and choices made by The Metaphor in his journey. This also allowed for me, eventually, to move him to playing the game of Dungeons and Dragons set up on the stage, which further allowed for her to manipulate his dice rolls as he attempted to move through the adventure in order to guide him through his necessary steps.

It did present a new issue, however, in that my script would need to be modified in order to take this method of communication into effect. The resources I had available were sufficient, but only were able to provide either a “yes” or a “no” to actions. It was flipping a switch, indicating for The Metaphor to continue with what he’s doing, or change it in favor of an alternative. Because of this, a lot of the actions taken through the piece had to be modified to facilitate searching for a response in this specific manner. It wasn’t possible to ask for complicated answers. The inquiries, instead, had to be changed to “Does this work?” and reacting to the response, or lack thereof.

For this to happen, I had to bring a soundscape into my world as well, as I didn’t want to just function with the lights clicking on and off, which seemed rather overtly binary to me. Returning to my personal roots of both tabletop and video games, and the music which myself and my friends would listen to during our time doing those things, I was immediately drawn to a specific playlist which my friends and I listened to while playing World of Warcraft during the early years of the game’s release. The genre was loosely described as “power metal” at the time, and involved heavy metal guitar lines and drum beats under soaring vocals singing lyrics that could be out of the greatest fantasy novels. My Pandora.com station, however, was lost to the annals of history, which required me to start digging again into that specific genre to try and find music that would fit the mood of the piece. Fortunately, the genre is alive and well, allowing for some pretty incredible music that has been created after I had quit following it regularly. As I

was scrolling through a “best of” list on the Internet, I discovered a song called “The Unicorn Invasion of Dundee” by Gloryhammer, a Scot-Swiss band. It is rather difficult for me to describe the exact feeling that I had when I heard it, but an overjoyed satisfaction came from its discovery that permeated the piece for its duration. The lyrics to this specific song are also included in Appendix E.

That song became the one of the theme songs of my piece, together with the song which ended the show, a merger of “Victory Strikes Again” and “Long Live the Party” by Andrew W.K., whose lyrics are also incredibly poignant and informative to the piece, and have been included in Appendix F.

At this point, as the production elements really started to come together for the project, I began investigating what I would need prop wise to facilitate the play. Obviously, the needs were going to be rather intensive, as a standard Dungeons and Dragons experience is at least marginally complicated, but I would need to be playing one that would read clearly to an audience. This meant many props and a lot of preparation. Fortunately, applying the basics of the game to the play was a simple process, especially once the decision was made to utilize the rolls of the dice to enact Rose’s will on the piece. One of the hidden successes that I had in this area specifically was finding oversized 20- sided dice for each player to have at their chair at the empty table. This allowed for instant recognition and a clear view for the audience of what is happening. As I worked early on in this process, the complexity of the setup was an immediate draw for my audiences, but having things visible and clear to them about what is happening kept them involved. This was made further clear by the board itself, the character sheets, dungeon master’s screen, books, and other elements that were brought to the table.

As time continued to move towards the performance dates, I found myself in the middle of October, three quarters the way through my script, with a rather sizable amount of writer's block in place over how to finish the piece. I had my ending, involving a redemptive return to heroism or the hero's life, and I had the moment in which I had my hero frustratedly announcing that he was quitting the game. However, I had little idea how to connect the two specifically. Taking a break from writing, I decided it was time to work on my design choices for my heroes look.

Realizing that superheroes are frequently associated with some sort of symbol, from Superman's "S" to the Fantastic Four's "4," I decided I wanted to incorporate a symbol for The Metaphor which would give him status as well as insight into his character. After mulling over some options, I tried seeing what Metaphor would look like if written in the original Greek, which yielded the resulting "μεταφορ." I worked to try and incorporate the entirety of the word into a design, but eventually settled on one of the individual letters, the Greek Letter Phi (φ), as a representative of the word in general.

This symbol was worked into the mask that I built for the character. I did an amount of research into modern costuming, and especially cosplaying techniques for mask making, arriving on a product called Worbla, a thin sheet thermoplastic. When heated, the sheets become extremely moldable and will take the form of whatever it's placed on. This allowed me to use a plaster cast of my face to pattern and sculpt the mask for my character. It was once the mask was formed, painted and sealed, I found an additional amount of motivation and insight into the world of my character. Placing the mask on and off brought a specific physical transformation that influenced how I moved and interacted on the stage. The feeling of wearing it changed things. It provided one of the last catalyst moments of my creative and devising process.

I was still stuck, however, as to how I was to connect the two ends of my script. Wanting some sort of catharsis and resolution to my hero's story, and especially with a resolution to the relationship with Rose, left me with a bit of a conundrum as to how to express a lot of the moral and symbolic purpose of my writing without having another character on stage to be able to actually speak. Having The Metaphor simply pull the lessons out of his own mind as he is dealing with the situations seemed a terrible concept.

It was around this time that the US election was underway, and while I don't want to infer that this in itself was a breakthrough point for me, there were some moments of clarity that arose because of the election and the reaction to its results. Specifically, I was increasingly drawn to two different ideas; first, the idea that people will fight against their own interests at times when they are disenfranchised, and second, the level of fear and worry that many voiced immediately following the announced results of the election. I had previously drafted a monologue of thoughts which had put together from my own interpretation of Andrew W.K.'s work, set in with my own ideas, and had left it to sit, hoping to use it at some point. It was two and a half pages, and a very dense piece of writing. As I was considering how I might use it, along with wanting some way to alleviate fear in general, I realized that I could have Rose still have words to say by having her leave a letter for The Metaphor to read upon completing the puzzle she had left for him. I immediately adapted my text into a letter, which only added to its size. What I ended up with was a three-page monstrosity of an on-the-nose commentary on the human condition and how we can best face it with positivity.

Working this letter into the script was easy enough, which worked well enough as a climax moment within the play, but the length proved quite an issue. Three pages read aloud with no action happening on the stage is an easy recipe for almost immediate disconnection by

the audience. So, these sprawling paragraphs were paired back painfully, bit by bit, to arrive at the final letter that made its way into the script. This was the single most difficult part of the writing process for me; taking messages which I believed in, ideas and concepts I very much wanted to address and talk about, and leave them on the proverbial cutting room floor for the sake of brevity and simplicity. Many of the notes I took at Andrew W.K.'s tours were included, though the final product only carries a few key statements. It felt like limbs were being cut off my script every time I deleted a sentence, but eventually it got paired down to its final version, which provided me with the last piece to the puzzle of my script. With the letter, as well, came the introduction of The Metaphor's actual name, Chuck.

Having a finalized script, making selective edits and adding in the last of my math calculations for the game sections, I finally could trustworthily send it to several peers and friends for notes and drafting. I made a conscious attempt to have many eyes on it, both those familiar with D&D and not, writers, scientists, other actors and artists. I wanted to make sure that things were understandable and clear on all levels. This last round of feedback proved some of the most useful, as they were people who had not been part of my consulting and devising process, and hence were fresh eyes on the script. This proved to be an invaluable resource to me, because I, and those I had already worked with, already had our preconceptions about how the script would be received. This effort to gather first impressions lead to several of the final changes that made the script work at the end of its process.

It was not until this point, barely a few weeks before our performance date, that I started getting my piece on its feet. I was aware that many members of my cohort were already workshopping their pieces, that they wanted to be actively working on their feet and feeling out how that would feel, but with the specifics that I had already decided upon within my world it

seemed counterintuitive to simply explore concepts that I couldn't live fully. I realize that this is my own personal way of working, but I had a clear enough picture of my destination that I felt like my best option was to get text in hand and work from it, rather than explore and find things through my process. I felt it much more important for me to have a solid script in hand to be able to work off, rather than try to use the rehearsal process as my primary source of devising my piece.

Getting into the rehearsal space finally gave good form to the project. It was difficult at first, as the set, a table at the center of the stage surrounded by chairs, and a lone standing door at one side, didn't really fill much. Trying to imagine exactly where things were and what was happening with the space itself took a significant amount of definition. I tried, at first, to keep things very close to the table itself, but this created issues with interacting with it before the prescribed time. Eventually, though this doesn't appear in the actual text, it became easier for me to imagine that the walls of the room weren't there, and just faded into an echoing blackness. The only light source would be in the immediate area of the table and door itself, which would lead to the desire to stay close to the illumination. This allowed for a full exploration of the stage, and brought a level of specificity to where I could truly explore the onstage environment.

My props began to arrive in the third week of November, and was an especially joyous moment, as rehearsals prior to this had simply been running lines and miming a lot of things. Feeling the weight of the dice, moving the miniatures on the board, being able to turn the pages of the manuals brought an increased level of belief and immersion into the piece. Being able to actually *do* what the script called for, rather than simply pretending and miming, allowed for a wonderful deepening of the acting experience, and allowed for a true solving of the problem.

One of the next issues that arose was specific placement of Rose within the space. As she was not actually present, I felt a need to find some sort of way to specify exactly where she would be within the space. This, however, proved to be counterproductive, as the more specific I tried to place her, from a location within the room with me, to a specific location in the audience, just ended up limiting my conversational abilities with her, destroyed the illusion of her not actually being present, and ended up reading false. Because of this, I eventually chose to place her in the ether above the audience, this specific choice allowing for a deal of relaxation and change in my dialogue, while still being accessible to the audience. This choice persisted through the performances of the piece successfully.

One of the last issues I faced was an issue of playing the script rather than the text itself. I had decided that Chuck's power set would involve him being able to copy the power of others around him, gaining both their abilities and a view into their lives. However, the script never mentions use of his power, what he can do, or how that affects the situations he encounters. Because of this, his powers became of little import in the actual story. However, as I received feedback on my rehearsals at this point in the creation process, from both my fellow MFA's and my committee members, it became clear that my playing of the character was reading hollow, that there wasn't depth to the way in which I was approaching him. One specific note of feedback asked for specifics in what his powers were and how he would use them. Realizing that my previous idea of his powers had found its way into the script as commentary rather than his power itself, I chose to change, at this point, my vision of Chuck's powers.

Moving away from copying powers, I instead gave him something tangible that I could focus on. Harkening back to *Blood of Heroes*, I had long loved the idea of manipulating light to create illusions and utilize the energy therein as a weapon, so I adapted this idea into my

character. Further specificity was required in the limitations of his powers, which was defined as being incapable of creating light, only being able to utilize the available illumination. While this had little actual impact on the script, it provided a jolt to my process of thinking about how my character interacted with the world, specifically the moment before charging into the room. If he has just spent time trying to weave the light in the hallway outside into an illusion, if he's running away from a group of people he is trying to fool, immediately before stepping into this dimly lit space, it lends itself to a level of immersion as the character, which reads to the audience. Further, it also provided a wonderful, surprise commentary on Rose's relationship to Chuck. During her process of communicating with him prior to his sitting down at the board, the first thing she does is gives him more light, a symbolic gesture for many, but in this specific instance it literally gives him fuel for his powers. It served to not only light his way, but also to give him the strength to continue.

As I continued to work further into the piece, I began inviting others into the process, hoping to see how my mix of human feeling and obscure nerdy references would resonate with a crowd. The reception, in general, was positive, but a lot of the feedback at this point in time led to many of the changes within the script which are found annotated in chapter 2. This was the primary time for me to make additional scriptural changes based on what was and wasn't understood during my rehearsals. There were several changes made at this point, minor things about being able to understand exactly what was happening through the course of the actual playing of the game.

One of the final notes I was given by my movement professor at the time was to search for a distinction between wearing the mask (in essence, being a super hero) and how things changed physically in removing the mask (reverting to the alter ego.) This was a specific concept

which I struggled with for the entirety of the rehearsal and performance track, but it was a necessary distinction to make. I initially hadn't clarified the change, physically, and this was reading as a blurred transition for my audiences. To try and find a truth to this, I workshopped with Stacey Cabaj, my professor of voice and acting. We made a few key adjustments from the school of Laban movement, a methodology used to categorize movements of the physical body, mixed with some of the work of Michael Chekhov, a pioneer of movement based training. One of the veins of Laban's work included what are referred to as "effort actions," specific ways of moving that carry with them an immediate association for both the participant and the observing audience. Working with Stacey, for example, I discovered that using Laban's *glide* alongside Chekhov's *radiate* read very true for my character's heroic form. However, moving from there to a nervous *slash* took away a lot of the directness that being a hero lent to the character, allowing his alter ego to be a bit more frantic, giving that distinct physical change we were looking for. I will admit, gladly, that my execution on this particular element was not consistent, nor would I anticipate many people noticed a great deal. Introducing it so late in the process was problematic for true application, but I would be very interested in exploring it more for future renditions of the piece.

In addition to this, a specific note came up within the dress rehearsal processes, immediately before performances. After my final dress rehearsal, I went in search of any final notes which could potentially be incorporated before the performances. Speaking with Stacey, yet again, it became clear I had fallen into one of the great actor traps of playing a character who, frankly, whines. The note I received was to try and make sure I was keeping the true intentions of my character in mind. He's worried about and trying to save his friends. He's trying to figure out how to get out of this place in order to help people. Yes, there's fear associated with it. Yes,

it's an inconvenience, and in a very real way a situation that needs to be escaped from. But there's hope motivating him through the whole process. He needs to get out to improve his own situation, and then help to improve the state that others are in. That switch from simply complaining and playing the victim to an active pursuit of a positive solution, motivated by a caring and the immediacy of the relationships at play provided one of the final puzzle pieces which fell into place before the performances began.

As the rest of these concepts fell into place, the script really started to show up on the stage. The final step was being able to finally synch up the technical elements. When the primary method of communication for the first half of the piece is through technical interaction with lights and sound, it becomes imperative that they are specific and accurate. Having to react to things that didn't happen, or happened at the wrong time, was in direct antithesis to the acting techniques I was attempting to utilize, specifically the Meisner technique I discussed earlier. Because of this, when the script called for those impulses to come, it was very necessary to have them be exact. Patience was required, but as the final rehearsals went into place, the interaction between the lights, sound, and character became real and telling. More specifically, the story of Chuck and Rose and the happenings of their interaction became real.

This process of readying to mount something of my own creation was daunting, as I was incredibly nervous about how the piece was going to be received. As has (and will) be discussed at length, I was aware that I was putting ideas and concepts on stage that many people weren't going to immediately find relatable. However, I was also confident that the humanity of my story could come through, and that the meaning of my piece had a chance to resonate on a very human level with an audience, regardless of their specific experience with my subject matter. Most importantly, I learned to give creation its time. I learned that I tend to work for a level of

completion in my work before I want to move out and let others in to see what's happening. And I learned that I gave myself a distinct advantage by writing about something that was never going to cloy for me, no matter how much time I spent with it.

CHAPTER 3. SCRIPTS, PERFORMANCES, RECEPTION, AND FEEDBACK

Chapter 3 includes two versions of the script for my solo performance, one which came from early October, and the final draft which I had assembled by the end of my performances. Included in the drafts are several annotations commenting on differences in the scripts as well as further insight into many of the included ideas which appear.

It then explores my feelings on the performances themselves, both the performances at LSU and the additional performance which took place in Logan, Utah. Covered, as well, are the reception of the piece by the general public, and a few key pieces of feedback and comments from various collaborators and attendees through the process.

3.1 IN-PROCESS DRAFT

This draft was utilized mid-process, around the month of October. Many adjustments had already been made, but there were some key adaptations afterword, particularly at the end. I discussed above the motivation for many of those adjustments, and annotations are included below for additional insights.

A dimly lit room. Table at front, covered in books and manuals from a tabletop roleplaying gaming session. Several figurines sit on a map at the center of the table. Food and drink wrappers litter the table and floor. In front of the DM screen sits a wooden box, chest-like.

Enter THE METAPHOR, a superhero, bloodied. His eyes are blacked, and he's wearing his mask. He is, otherwise, in street clothes. He's in a hurry, running from something. He is surprised to find himself in the room. He very clearly doesn't know how he got there. He tries to leave through the door, finding it locked. He turns, searching the room frantically, terrified.

METAPHOR

What? This isn't... *(He walks around, taking the room in)* How...? *(With sudden realization, yelling to an unseen listener in resignation)* ¹Rose? You're in my head again aren't you? Rose...? Why did you bring me here? WHY AM I HERE?

M goes to the door of the room, finding it locked. He puts his shoulder to it and pushes. It doesn't budge. He pushes harder. Nothing. He yells with the exertion, but the door does not give.

METAPHOR

Rose, if this is you, you've got to help me. Everything fell apart. We got a call, doomsday device at the center of the city. We got there, destroyed it, everything seemed fine. But when got out of the building there were so many people waiting outside. Just people. Not soldiers, not super villains, just people. All the sudden we heard someone yell "The Crusaders destroyed my house" and then they all lost their minds. Suddenly they were charging us. From what I've been able to get they arrested Travis and Brady, and Cuyler and Drew are in the hospital now. I managed to get away, but I don't know how long I can hold out.

¹ This section brought a great deal more confusion, as I was asking the audience to make a large leap instantly, and further asking them to try and digest a lot of specific details early. I opted to leave references to mind power till later

He waits, expectantly. There's no answer for him.

It wasn't anyone with superpowers that finally broke us, Rose. We used to joke that it would be someone who knew all our weaknesses who eventually beat us. You want to talk about a weakness? Try when the people you're trying to save and protect turn on you. What were we supposed to do? Start fighting civilians? Carve our way out through a bunch of innocent people?

So you brought me here to keep me safe, right? You did that time/dimension/reality thing where you transported me here so I can hide out and escape?

Again, there is no response. He begins to worry, trying the door again, finding it locked.

METAPHOR

Rose! Look, no one else could do this. No one else would know this room. We've done this all before, I get it. So why don't you come out and just tell me what you want? Let me know that everything's ok and what the plan is?

The silence is pervasive. There is no answer.

METAPHOR

Rose! I've barely heard a breath out of you in 4 years. You were everything to me and then you just disappear. I know you got hurt, that you left with the team in mind, that we needed to learn to fight without you. But I spent so much time wishing for you to come back. ²Every night I gave up on you. And then the next morning I'd wake up finding myself hoping that you'd come back. But there was nothing. And suddenly *this*. You can't possibly think you can just grab me like this and have me sit, with nothing. So we're here. What now?

M looks around in anticipation. Nothing happens. Frustrated, he stands, moves forward to the table. The lighting around the table warms, subtle, as he moves into it. During the next piece of text, he takes his mask off, angrily putting it onto the table.

² Small edit here, but the lines weren't flowing during performance in the way I would have wanted them to. Small tweaks were made a great deal in order to get the language flowing better.

METAPHOR

(Sinking slowly to the floor) Yes, I managed to escape, because there's nothing else I can do. I run back into the building, try to get out the back way, and what happens? I find myself transported through time to the basement where I used to play role playing games with my friends. Oh no! How did I get here? Maybe because someone is using their incredible psychic powers to MESS WITH MY HEAD!

He leans on the side of the table in frustration, his hands resting on the books placed there. As soon as his fingers touch, lights blaze up on the table. M staggers back slightly, blinded by the light, stepping out of the circle of light created around the table. As he steps out, the light dims and dies.

Glancing around, he steps back to the table, once again placing his hand on the book. The light returns in force, but he stands there this time, taking it in.

METAPHOR

Ok.

The blazing lights dim to a bearable level.

M sits in the chair at the top of the table, behind the rulebooks and Dungeon Master screen, as he does, the lights fade. He looks up, questioning, and then stands. As he rises so do the lights.

METAPHOR

Seriously? SERIOUSLY?

Nothing happens. He waits a moment more.

METAPHOR

Great. Fine. Fine. Your way. Your way like always.

He shifts over to another chair, the empty one immediately to his left. Instantly the lights fade.

METAPHOR

(jumping to his feet and moving into the chair on the far side of the table) FINE! I'M IN MYYYYY CHAIR NOW ARE WE DONE?

He sits, his anger holding him in a stiff posture, then slowly melts, realizing that this also wasn't the key to his getting out. A step, but not the final key.

METAPHOR

OK. Always games with you. Always. You come sweeping back in and start with your puzzles and your mind games. Even before we all got our powers, before we even considered becoming “The Crusaders” it was always these cute games. ³I knew you’d ask me for help on the computer at work just so I’d stand behind you and we could touch for just a moment, and that you wore perfume just to mess me. And that was before you got the ability to play around with time and bend reality. But, please, not now. Please. I promise, I will do whatever you want me to do. Just let me leave.

He sits. Waiting. Still nothing changes. No response.

METAPHOR

Look, we didn’t ask for this. I didn’t ask for the special powers, or the responsibility, or any of it. As far as I know, none of us did. We were just people. Sure, we sat around, rolling dice, pretending to fight evil and save the world, but it was just kids playing a game. You’ve

³ While I loved the idea of including this small detail of the previous relationship between the two, it felt like clunky exposition, especially after taking the piece on its feet and realizing that it didn’t follow the needs of the character at all. It was cut in favor of letting The Metaphor pursue getting out of the room more.

obviously been watching all of this. For the first time since we founded the Crusaders, I don't know if we can win. You can see it. I know you can. It's bigger than me. Bigger than you. Bigger than all of us. (*He motions to the table around him.*) Any of us that sat around this table, it's bigger than...

As he tries to finish this thought, he picks up one of the figures. Immediately music blares to life. Something metal, adventurous. Think Through Fire and Flames. Dragonforce. Something full of adventure.

METAPHOR

It's bigger than some game...

He sits, holding the figurine in his hand. The music blares. And he places the figure back where it was. The lights and music both die. He stops, dropping his head in exasperation. He reaches out and picks up a different figure. The music and lights stay low, almost out of sensory awareness. He looks up, and in a controlled rage, places the figure back down on the table softly, moving to pick up the original figure. As his fingers brush against it, the music and lights return, swelling and growing. He looks at the figure in his hand, searching his memory, and obviously comes to recognize it. There's a slight smile, a tiny laugh of exasperation.

METAPHOR

All right. All right.

He carefully replaces the figure at its original place on the board but keeps his finger on it.

METAPHOR

(*Looking at the board*) So where are we? What's going on?

M stands, looking to get a better look at the map. He gets above it, studying.

METAPHOR

Epic adventure. Level 20 characters. Me. A Dwarven paladin. And I'm alone in chamber at the back the map. Door leading into the rest of the map on one side, door leading outside on the other. Chest on the side of the room.

He looks down at the paper in front of his chair.

METAPHOR

Interior dungeon map, and there's the characters for everyone else. Human wizard would be Travis, dark elf rogue is Drew, half-elf ranger is Cuyler, halfling bard is of course Brady. They're all together at the entrance. There's a large group of *(he checks behind the DM screen)* ... townspeople? In the room with them? And a ⁴basilisk behind all of them, at the back of the room.

As he talks through things, he gets up and explores the table, finding each character's sheet at their chair. He paces around the room, putting his energy into the board now.

METAPHOR

This is the Treasure of the Walker. This is the map where we came up with the name "The Crusaders." We had no idea what that was going to become someday. We'd sit here, all sitting around pretending to be heroes, you sitting behind that screen and taking us through our adventures. We couldn't beat this map. Ever. You never let us beat it. Every time we tried we'd just end up getting petrified by the giant lizard. But you always dangled that stupid treasure in the box in front of us, and all of us were too stubborn to give up. So what's in there?

He walks behind the DM's stand, reaching for the chest. Instantly the lights fall.

⁴ As was noted earlier, the choice of enemy in the room went through several different iterations. Starting with Mind Flayers, then a dragon, Basilisk was the most long lived before landing at the final version, as it provided several useful mechanics with its petrifying abilities which could lock down the party members. However, upon receiving my bucket of props, I found a very cool figurine of a giant demon, which ultimately prompted the move to demon in the final edition. I've been tempted to include a note saying the actual enemy doesn't matter, as long as it's a threat and you're consistent.

METAPHOR

Ok! Ok fine! I put it down! I'm not looking!

He walks around the side of the table, back to his chair.

METAPHOR

Rose, I wasted enough time trying to get into that chest in college. I'm not going to try now. It's pointless. Clearly. So. My turn. I leave the room. I walk out the door. Done?

He looks up expectantly, grabbing a D20 and throwing it at the board, ignoring the result, instead, standing and going to the door, tries to open it. It remains locked. He lets his frustration get the better of him again.

METAPHOR

You've got to be kidding me.

Back to the table. Looking down. Moves his character back to where it was.

METAPHOR

Ok. So I can't?

Staring at the board, trying to figure out what to do.

METAPHOR

Rose, I don't know your rules.

Glancing down, seeing the dice. Picks up the d20.

METAPHOR

Rules.

He keeps staring. Finally, he looks back at the board.

METAPHOR

I roll an intelligence test to see if I can figure anything out about the door. My intelligence is... 8? Really?

He rolls the dice.

METAPHOR

So... You gave me a 3? You had me roll a 3?? That's an 11 total on the check.

He sits in his seat, frustrated.

METAPHOR

Which means..., nothing. I get nothing. Great.

He returns to staring at the board.

METAPHOR

It's just me. There's nothing else to do. Unless... (*considering the table*) Unless that's just my turn...?

He stands, moves to his left to the next chair at the table. He sits down, expecting things to fade. Nothing does. He waits. The music and lights stay the same. He glances down at the character sheet in front of that chair.

METAPHOR

Ok. It would be Travis's turn? Yes? Wizard? He makes the intelligence role. For the door. He's got a native... 14? And... (*examining the character sheet closer*) And an amulet. Of... The Amulet of By'moar. Intelligence +5 when rolling to try and solve a physical puzzle.

So Travis gets to start off on at a 19. Sounds right.

Ok, so I ask my wizard to make the roll about how to open the door.

M takes the die and throws it. As he does, the lights dim on the room.

COME ON.

Lights come back up.

What? Why can't he make the roll...?

M frantically searches the map, trying to find something...

(Thinking through the situation aloud) Ok, so... He's on the far side of the door. The party clearly has line of sight on the door. There shouldn't be a problem. Unless... They can't hear me. They don't know I'm there.

He sits, staring at the board.

They don't know I'm here.

He crosses behind the DM stand, examining the papers there.

Well, since you've already apparently got the initiative order settled, it seems my wizard is up first. I'm just going to take combat rolls. So, instead, the wizard casts ⁵Ray of Frost against the enemies directly in front of him.

⁵ As will frequently happen in the actual role playing sections of the piece, Ray of Frost was not as well-known of a spell. It took a few iterations to find something instantly recognizable to most people, but the eventual choice of "lightning" is much more immediately recognizable as inherently dangerous than "frost."

Success? Success, dealing 5 d8 of damage... That's 4 minions down. *(he pulls two of the figures off the board)*

M moves to the next character sheet, sitting in the chair in front of it.

Ok. Next up, our bard. Brady. He's going to cast Bardic Inspiration to give combat advantage to the rogue and ranger. Roll. Success. So, they get to roll two dice and take the better result.

Ok, Cuyler's turn. Ranger. He will Volley to take out the last of the minions in the room. Roll. Success.

That's the last of the minions gone. And that gives my rogue an attack of opportunity on the Mind Flayer. Done. Ones. Crit fail...

Why? I mean... ok. Fine. Here we go. Fumble chart. An 87. *Horrible aftermath. (searching the chart, and reading)* Roll twice on this chart and apply both effects to yourself. *(he drops his head in frustration)* Alright.

(rolling the dice again) First: 64. Wrong target. You mistakenly strike an ally adjacent to you with the attack... the ranger. And... critical hit. Max damage plus another d8 damage. Ranger goes to death rolls.

(again, rolling the dice) Second: 100. No! Your attack ricochets back and you hit yourself. Apply maximum critical damage to yourself as if you had hit your target.

That's... 24 points of damage...

He sits, stunned for a moment, trying to wrap his mind around what's just happened.

That's the ranger and rogue down. Cuyler and Drew...

So now what? I've lost two, and we're out of turns this round. It would be your go. But you're not even here. So now what?

He waits. No response. He looks at the board. Making up his mind.

Well, if you're not here, it seems I'll have to take your turn for you, right?

M walks to behind the DM screen, pulling up one of the NPC sheets, reading off it.

So, all you have left is the mind flayer. Why don't we have him use Mind Blast against the bard and wizard.

He rolls. Clearly a success.

Both targets take 4d8+4 of damage. *(he rolls, calculating)* That's 22 damage, to each. Both are now under direct mind control of the flayer⁶. Prisoners. It's over.

I did it. I've finished off my own party. Are you happy? Is that what you've wanted? Basically dead or captured, and I'm the only survivor. Great lesson, Rose. Very clear!

M sits in frustration, his control really beginning to slip. Not to frustration and anger, but to fear and despair.

Rose, we were in it together. For years. All of us. You're my family. Everything we went through, the games, when we all woke up with powers, when you said you had to leave to keep us safe, all of it. We were in it together.

⁶ Once again, we see a bit of confusion (even within this draft) as to exactly what was going on in the room as far as enemies to be conquered. Initially, I had tried to mix up the effects of what was happening to the various party members to mirror exactly what was happening to the rest of the Crusaders outside the room. But with so little expository information, it became much easier to simply kill them all off, removing the needed status effects such as Mind Control by the mind flayer or Petrification by the basilisk.

But that's gone now. The world we knew is ending. How am I supposed to believe in a greater good when all I see out there is hatred and pain? How am I supposed to fight an idea all by myself?⁷

He finally gives in. A last moment, and then the collapse.

Everything we did? What does it matter? We put our lives on the line. It was hard. I got hurt. People I loved got hurt.

You've been able to hide. To work from the shadows. To pull this kind of psychic stuff every time you've needed to run away. But that doesn't work for me.

Do you have any idea how hard it is to try to hold down a day job when you've used your two weeks of yearly vacation by the end of February? What it's like to show up to your next interview bloodied and beat up, with no explanation besides the fact that I'm "training in MMA." I have to scour the internet to make sure Facebook's facial detection algorithms don't accidentally tag me in a picture. I've had to teach myself Photoshop to edit myself into photos just so I have a legitimate excuse to give my family about why I haven't made dinner in months. And that's just the mundane, every day nonsense. That doesn't even cover the actual dangerous super-heroing part. And all this because I have a special set of powers? And, according to you, I should use those powers for good and to help people?

And do you know what's even worse? Watching people get hurt, knowing that I'm not actually in danger. In the right circumstances, I could take a bullet to my head and be fine. I get that privilege. But then, I look at everyone else, the everyday, normal people who are suffering right now. People who are scared for their lives. And I can't relate. I can't help them, not all of them, not in the everyday things that make them scared. I get to sit, safe, knowing that in reality, I'm

⁷ While an admirable sentiment, it seemed very "on the nose" for Chuck to suddenly be acutely aware of the giant philosophical questions which his situations could possibly raise. Opting instead for a more immediate approach, I believe that many of these questions were left floating in the ether, without directly saying "but what about this huge question of philosophy that is a lesson the playwright wants us to learn?"

going to come out of this ok. And I get to keep living, feeling the guilt of watching others suffer when I don't, every day of my life.

It can't work like this, Rose. It's too hard. I can't do it anymore. That's why I left. Is that what you wanted to hear? I gave up. I ran away.

And that's exactly what I'm going to do here. I'm done with your game. I'm done with all of this.

I quit.

M reaches to the table, knocking the figure of his paladin over, and sits down dejected. Underneath the figure he knocked over is a small emblem. He sees it, picks it up.

A key?

M slowly moves the key over to himself. He looks at it, then looks at the board.

I put the key into the lock on the door.

He rolls. Clearly a negative result. He waits. Thinking.

I use the key in the chest on the back of the room.

He rolls. Success. He slowly opens the chest, removes a paper, and reads aloud.

The words of this scroll must be read aloud, completely, and when finished will free the prisoner from their confinement.

There are two doors to choose, Paladin. One leads you outside, to freedom, and a solitary life of complacency.

The other leads back into the building, to the fight you chose, to those you've fought alongside, and potentially to your doom.

A word of advice, to aid you in your choice.

⁸Chuck,

Congratulations. You've finally opened the chest. Not exactly the same treasure that was in here when we were kids, but I don't think that keys to my comic collection would help you much now.

I can't come back to you, Chuck. Not now. I don't know if I ever will be able to. To be honest, I'm not sure if I want you to let me go and move on, or if your hope inspires me to keep going. I worry that I've used the last of my powers to get this message to you. But that's not important right now. What is important, is that you are thinking about giving up on everything we fought for.

I could tell you the pain eventually fades, that at some point it gets easier and better, but it doesn't. The challenge, then, is finding the through line of goodness that runs through existence.

The hard times don't have to be bad times, Chuck. Maybe the purpose of existence is to find a way to live the hard times while not losing sight of hope and joy.

⁸ This letter resolved one of the earlier issues which I discussed earlier in how to have an interjection and new material introduced into the scene without needing to have additional characters. There was a bit of debate in my mind as to whether or not to record a female voice reading it, and simply have Chuck respond from stage while hearing it. Ultimately, however, that specific interaction drove Chuck to a place of being passive on stage, simply sitting and listening, which not only read terribly, but was an absolutely horrible climax to the piece. Opting to "discover" these words new every night, and letting them actually affect me was a significant choice, but one that eventually made the play work.

True strength is allowing yourself to encounter the hopelessness and despair, and still move forward. The only choice we have is how we orient ourselves to the inevitable storms of existence.

I didn't come back because I don't want you to make this choice for me, or for us. I want you to do it because you believe in.

Every moment counts. Every life counts. All of it counts. Inside you've got a voice that is constantly whispering that you can be better than you are. Now it's time to prove that to yourself.

P.S. You didn't have to read the whole letter out loud to unlock the door. Just the opening part. But I miss hearing your voice sometimes. Choose well.

*M stands, still. He crosses to the door, twists the knob, finding it unlocked, and pushes it slightly open. He waits by it. He stands, frozen. He turns, his eyes returning to the table. He crosses, determined, picks up the figure of the paladin, his d20, and, finally, his mask, and hurries out of the room. Lights out.*⁹

⁹ This was the earliest version of the ending, simply allowing Chuck to walk out of the room. However, it left a lot of loose ends in the room. I eventually decided on a more holistic approach to the ending, allowing Chuck to go back into the room, defeat the demon which had been plaguing him, and save his friends. Allowing my protagonist to consciously make a choice, then actively do something to free himself in both the room and life was my key to actually telling the story I wanted told, as opposed to hi simply being freed from a trap which he had fallen into.

3.2 FINAL DRAFT

This draft represents my final performance script, including any changes I remember having made during the additional performance in Utah. Once again, annotations are included as a guide to the text and to offer insight into my particular writing processes.

A dimly lit room. Table at front, covered in books and manuals from a tabletop roleplaying gaming session. Several figurines sit on a map at the center of the table. Food and drink wrappers litter the table and floor¹⁰. In front of the DM screen sits a wooden box, chest-like.

Enter THE METAPHOR, a superhero, bloodied. His eyes are blacked, and he's wearing his mask. He is, otherwise, in street clothes, or his costume if you'd like? Something that at least reads "heroish." He's in a hurry, running from something. He is surprised to find himself in the room. He very clearly doesn't know how he got there. He tries to leave through the door, finding it locked. He turns, searching the room frantically, terrified.

METAPHOR

How...? (With sudden realization, speaking to an unseen listener) Rose? Rose...? Why did you bring me here? WHY AM I HERE?

M goes to the door of the room, finding it locked. He puts his shoulder to it and pushes. It doesn't budge. He pushes harder. Nothing. He yells with the exertion, but the door does not give.

METAPHOR

Rose, if this is you, you've got to help me. Everything fell apart. The team got a call, the world needing ¹¹"The Crusaders" to save the day again, there's a doomsday device at the center of the city. We got there, destroyed it, everything seemed fine. But when got out of the building there were so many people waiting outside. Just people. Not soldiers, not super villains, just people. All the sudden we heard someone yell "The Crusaders destroyed my house" and then they turned on us. Suddenly they were charging at us. From what I saw they arrested Travis and Brady, and

¹⁰ This specific detail was brought in later in order to give the room the feel of having been lived in, and recently. The script reads very cinematically, and would be very good if I could literally have had walls on the room. However, without that, small details like a box of Hostess cakes, and Dr. Pepper cans gave both a feeling of specificity for me as the actor, as well as setting the scenery for the audience.

¹¹ Specificity in knowing that the team's name was "The Crusaders" prompted moving that here, and framing it in a way to ensure that it was understood

Cuyler and Drew¹² are in the hospital now. I managed to get away, but I don't know how long I can hold out.

He waits, expectantly. There's no answer for him.

¹³So you brought me here to keep me safe, right? You froze time out there, and brought me back to some kind of memory so I can hide out and escape?

He waits again. Silence.

It wasn't anyone with superpowers that finally broke us, Rose. We used to joke that it would be someone who knew all our weaknesses who eventually beat us. You want to talk about a weakness? Try when the people you're trying to save and protect turn on you. What were we supposed to do? Start fighting civilians? Carve our way out through a bunch of innocent people?

Again, there is no response. He begins to worry, trying the door again, finding it locked.

METAPHOR

Rose! Look, no one else could do this. No one else would know this room. We've done this all before, I get it. So why don't you come out and just tell me what you want? Let me know that everything's ok and what the plan is?

The silence is pervasive. There is no answer.

¹² Having role played with many different people over the years, it seemed too good of an opportunity to pass up to give at least a couple mentions to some of the greatest friends I'd made during those processes. Brady Campbell, Travis Barrus, Drew Taylor and Cuyler Meade have all played individual and pivotal moments in my role-playing experiences and life, so this seemed very fitting to put them into a scene based on being worried about my friends.

¹³ This proved to be the easiest method to explain powers, and seemed to be the most logical presentation of the same paragraphs from the first draft. A lot of the acting of this piece in specific required that the choices would be made in clear logical steps, one idea leading clearly to the next. Because of that, I shuffled the paragraphs from earlier versions into this order. Several pages affected.

METAPHOR

¹⁴(*Speaking to himself, with growing annoyance*) I'm running through an office building downtown, open a door, and suddenly I find myself transported to the basement where I used to play role playing games with my friends. Oh no! How did I get here? Maybe because someone is using their incredible psychic powers to MESS WITH MY HEAD!

M looks around in anticipation. Nothing happens. Frustrated, he stands, moves forward to the table. The lighting around the table warms, subtle, as he moves into it.

METAPHOR

Rose! I've barely heard a breath out of you in 4 years. You were everything to me and then you just disappear. I know you got hurt, that you left with the team in mind, that we needed to learn to fight without you. But I spent so much time wishing for you to come back. Every single night I'd go to sleep wishing that I'd somehow I could forget about you. Then you'd find my way into my dreams, and then the next morning I'd wake up finding myself hoping that you'd come back. But there was nothing. And suddenly *this*. You can't possibly think you can just grab me like this and have me sit, with nothing.

He leans on the side of the table in frustration, his hands resting on the books placed there. As soon as his fingers touch, lights blaze up on the table. M staggers back slightly, blinded by the light, stepping out of the circle of light created around the table. As he steps out, the light dims and dies.

Glancing around, he steps back to the table, once again placing his hand on the book. The light returns in force, but he stands there this time, taking it in.

METAPHOR

Ok.

¹⁴ This specific paragraph became very angrily sarcastic in performance, yielding a very distinct ring to the way that the two characters interacted prior to this story. It was missing very early on, and ended up providing an essential view into the relationship of the two characters

The blazing lights dim to a bearable level. M sits in the chair at the top of the table, behind the rulebooks and Dungeon Master screen, as he does, the lights fade. He looks up, questioning, and then stands. As he rises so do the lights.

METAPHOR

Seriously? SERIOUSLY?

Nothing happens. He waits a moment more.

METAPHOR

Great. Fine. Fine. Your way. Your way like always.

He shifts over to another chair, the empty one immediately to his left. Instantly the lights fade.

METAPHOR

(jumping to his feet and moving into the chair on the far side of the table) FINE! I'M IN MYYYYY CHAIR NOW ARE WE DONE?

He sits, his anger holding him in a stiff posture, then slowly melts, realizing that this also wasn't the key to his getting out. A step, but not the final key.

METAPHOR

OK. Always games with you. Always. You come sweeping back in and start with your puzzles and your mind games. Even before we all got our powers, before we even considered becoming "The Crusaders" it was always these cute games. And that was before you got the ability to play around with time and bend reality¹⁵. But, please, not now. Please. I promise, I will do whatever you want me to do. Just let me leave.

¹⁵ Interestingly enough, trying to get specific within the piece about exactly what Rose is capable of only served to confuse and muddy the waters of actually solving the problems which had come up for Chuck.

Waiting. Still nothing changes. No response. He stands, removing the mask.

METAPHOR

Look, I didn't ask for this. I didn't ask for the special powers, or the responsibility, or any of it. As far as I know, none of us did. We were just people. Sure, we sat around, rolling dice, pretending to fight evil and save the world, but it was just kids playing a game. You've obviously been watching all of this. For the first time since we founded the Crusaders, I don't know if we can win. You can see it. I know you can. It's bigger than me. Bigger than you. Bigger than all of us. (*He motions to the table around him.*) Any of us that sat around this table, it's bigger than...

As he tries to finish this thought, he picks one of his d20. Immediately music blares to life. Something metal, adventurous. The Unicorn Invasion of Dundee by Gloryhammer, for example.

METAPHOR

It's bigger than some game...

He sits, holding the d20 in his hand. The music blares. And he places the figure back where it was. The lights and music both die. He stops, dropping his head in exasperation. He reaches out and picks up a different dice. The music and lights stay low, almost out of sensory awareness. He looks up, and in a controlled rage, places the die back down on the table softly, moving to pick up the original d20. As his fingers brush against it, the music and lights return, swelling and growing. He looks at the figure in his hand, searching his memory, and obviously comes to recognize it.

METAPHOR

This is why they are intentionally left vague, with allusions to the immensity of her abilities without listing them off.

¹⁶All right. All right. (*Looking at the board*) So where are we? What's going on? The map is the interior of a dungeon. Epic adventure. Level 20 characters. Me. A Dwarven paladin. And I'm alone in chamber at the back the map. Door leading into the rest of the map on one side, door leading outside on the other. Chest on the side of the room. There's the characters for everyone else. (*He moves around the table, checking the character sheets*) Human wizard would be Travis, dark elf rogue is Drew, half-elf ranger is Cuyler, halfling bard is of course Brady. They're all together at the entrance. There's a large group of (*he checks behind the DM screen*) ... townspeople? In the room with them? And a demon lord behind all of them, at the back of the room.

This is the Treasure of ¹⁷Welks-Kreer. This is the map where we came up with the name "The Crusaders." We had no idea what that was going to become someday. We'd sit here, pretending to be heroes, you sitting behind that screen and taking us through our adventures. We couldn't beat this map. Ever. You never let us beat it. Every time we tried we'd just end up getting killed by the giant demon. But you always dangled that stupid treasure in the box in front of us, and all of us were too stubborn to give up. So what's in there?

He reaches for the chest. Instantly the lights fall.

METAPHOR

Ok! Ok fine! I put it down! I'm not looking!

Rose, I wasted enough time trying to get into that chest in college. I'm not going to try now. It's pointless. Clearly. So. My turn. I leave the room. I walk out the door. Done?

¹⁶ There are several examples of formatting differences between the editions of the script, most of which were made in favor of simplicity, trimming down a lot of open space and the pauses that came up with them in performance in favor of pushing the text together and having it drive more

¹⁷ Becoming the eventual title of the piece, I struggled with what to refer to the adventure as for a long time, eventually deciding on a derivation of Wilkes-Krier, the last name of Andrew W.K. The name sounded "fantasy" enough to be in the mix.

He looks up expectantly, grabbing a D20 and throwing it at the board, ignoring the result, instead, standing and going to the door, tries to open it. It remains locked. He lets his frustration get the better of him again.

METAPHOR

You've got to be kidding me.

Back to the table. Looking down.

METAPHOR

Ok. So I can't?

Staring at the board, trying to figure out what to do.

METAPHOR

Rose, I don't know your rules.

Glancing down, seeing the dice. Picks up the d20.

METAPHOR

Rules.

He keeps staring. Finally, he looks back at the board.

METAPHOR

I roll an intelligence test to see if I can figure anything out about the door. My intelligence is...
8? Really?

He rolls the dice.

METAPHOR

So... You gave me a 3? You had me roll a 3?? That's an 11 total on the check.

He sits in his seat, frustrated.

METAPHOR

Which means... nothing. I get nothing. Great.

He returns to staring at the board.

METAPHOR

It's just me. There's nothing else to do. Unless... (*considering the table*) Unless that's just my turn...?

He stands, moves to his right to the next chair at the table. He sits down, expecting things to fade. Nothing does. He waits. The music and lights stay the same. He glances down at the character sheet in front of that chair.

METAPHOR

Ok. It would be Travis's turn? Yes? Wizard? He makes the intelligence role. For the door. He's got a native... 19? And... (*examining the character sheet closer*) And an amulet. Of... The Amulet of By'moar. Intelligence +5 when rolling to try and solve a physical puzzle.

So Travis gets to start off on at a 24. Over double mine. Sounds right.

Ok, so I ask my wizard to make the roll about how to open the door.

M takes the die and throws it. As he does, the lights dim on the room.

COME ON.

Lights come back up.

What? Why can't he make the roll...?

M frantically searches the map, trying to find something...

(Thinking through the situation aloud) Ok, so... He's on the far side of the door. The party clearly has line of sight on the door. There shouldn't be a problem. Unless... They can't hear me. They don't know I'm there.

He sits, staring at the board.

They don't know I'm here.

He crosses behind the DM stand, examining the papers there.

Well, since you've already apparently got the initiative order settled, it seems my wizard is up first. I'm just going to take combat rolls. So, instead, the wizard casts Lightning Bolt against the townspeople in front of him, and the demon lord.

That is... 17 d6 of damage even if they make their save rolls, they're dead. So *(he rolls for damage)* that's 12 of them down. *(he pulls two of the figures off the board)* And, that's a hit on the demon lord as well, for 86 points of damage.

M moves to the next character sheet, sitting in the chair in front of it.

Ok. Next up, our bard. Brady. He's going to use Bardic Inspiration to give combat advantage to the rogue and ranger. So, they get to roll two dice and take the better result.

Ok, Cuyler's turn. Ranger. He will volley, targeting the last minions in the room, and the demon lord. ¹⁸He needs at least a 2 to hit the people. *(he rolls 5x)* Hit, hit, hit, hit, hit. And a 14 to hit the demon lord. *(he rolls again)* Hit. Max damage for a longbow, 13 damage on the demon lord.

That's the last of the minions gone. I'm going to take an extra attack with the rogue this turn. Attacking with my poisoned rapier. Need a 4. *(He rolls)* Critical hit. Max damage is... 16 damage. 29 total. Second attack by the rogue. Critical fail...

Why? I mean... ok. Fine. Here we go. Fumble chart. *(he rolls 2 d10)* 87. *Horrible aftermath. (searching the chart, and reading)* Roll twice on this chart and apply both effects to yourself. *(he drops his head in frustration)* Alright.

(rolling the dice again) First: 64. Wrong target. You mistakenly strike an ally adjacent to you with the attack... the ranger. And... critical hit. Max damage plus another d8 damage. Ranger goes to death rolls.

(again, rolling the dice) Second: 100. No! Your attack ricochets back and you hit yourself. Apply maximum critical damage to yourself as if you had hit your target.

That's... 24 points of damage...

He sits, stunned for a moment, trying to wrap his mind around what's just happened.

That's the ranger and rogue down. Cuyler and Drew...

So now what? I've lost two, and we're out of turns this round. It would be your go. But you're not even here. So now what?

¹⁸ Once again, we arrive at a needed moment of specificity. Simply using the term "volley" was confusing to the audience as to exactly what was happening. Volley in actual gameplay requires an individual roll for every target, which I had previously condensed in favor of simplicity. Moving to a full set of rolls worked better from a story telling side, and also let me adhere to the actual rules of the game.

He waits. No response. He looks at the board. Making up his mind.

Well, if you're not here, it seems I'll have to take your turn for you, right?

M walks to behind the DM screen, pulling up one of the NPC sheets, reading off it.

So, all you have left is the demon lord. We're going to have him dual attack with the long sword and whip, against the wizard and bard.

He rolls. Clearly a success.

That will beat their armor, that's going to be enough damage to send them into death throws.

I did it. I've finished off my own party. Are you happy? Is that what you've wanted? The rest of the group down, and I'm the only survivor. Great lesson, Rose. Very clear!

M sits in frustration, his control really beginning to slip. Not to frustration and anger, but to fear and despair.

Rose, we were in it together. For years. All of us. You're my family. Everything we went through, the games, when we all woke up with powers, when you said you had to leave to keep us safe, all of it. We were in it together.

But that's gone now. The world we knew is ending. I just had to run away from a mob of people whose lives I saved. People don't want our help. They're scared, of us, of each other, of people who are different than them. And they're looking for someone to blame for it.

He finally gives in. A last moment, and then the collapse.

Everything we did? What does it matter? We put our lives on the line. It was hard. I got hurt. People I loved got hurt.

You've been able to hide. To work from the shadows. To pull this kind of psychic stuff every time you've needed to run away. But that doesn't work for me.

Do you have any idea how hard it is to try to hold down a day job when you've used your two weeks of yearly vacation by the end of February? What it's like to show up to your next interview bloodied and beat up, with no explanation besides the fact that I'm "training in MMA." I have to scour the internet to make sure Facebook's facial detection algorithms don't accidentally tag me in a picture. I've had to teach myself Photoshop to edit myself into photos just so I have a legitimate excuse to give my family about why I haven't made Sunday dinner in months. And that's just the mundane, every day nonsense. That doesn't even cover the actual dangerous superheroing part. And all this because I have a special set of powers? And, according to you, I should use those powers for good and to help people?

And do you know what's even worse? Watching people get hurt, knowing that I'm not actually in danger. In the right circumstances, I could take a bullet to my head and be fine. I get that privilege. I can fly to the moon and destroy a giant laser aimed to destroy the world, but I can't make people's everyday lives easier. I look at everyone else, the everyday, normal people who are suffering right now. People who are scared for their lives. And I can't relate. I can't help them, not all of them, not in the everyday things that make them scared. I get to sit, safe, knowing that in reality, I'm going to come out of this ok. And I get to keep living, feeling the guilt of watching others suffer when I don't, every day of my life.¹⁹

It can't work like this, Rose. It's too hard. I can't do it anymore. That's why I left. Is that what you wanted to hear? I gave up. I ran away.

And that's exactly what I'm going to do here. I'm done with your game. I'm done with all of this.

¹⁹ You'll note a few differences within this paragraph from the earlier draft as well. In rehearsal, the former versions were reading very cold, which lead me to trying an additional amount of personalization. In earlier drafts this was even more evident. Moving toward making this specific paragraph a landing point for the character really helped to convey his ultimate question of "why?"

I quit.

M reaches to the table, knocking the figure of his paladin over, and sits down dejected. Underneath the figure he knocked over is a small emblem. He sees it, picks it up.

A key?

M slowly moves the key over to himself. He looks at it, then looks at the board.

I put the key into the lock on the door.

He rolls. Clearly a negative result. He waits. Thinking.

I use the key in the chest on the back of the room.

He rolls. Success. He slowly opens the chest, removes a paper, and reads aloud.

The words of this scroll must be read aloud, completely, and when finished will free the prisoner from their confinement.

In this chest you will find The Mace of the Wrim²⁰. That mace will allow you to choose your destiny.

You have two paths to follow, Paladin. One leads you outside, to freedom, and a solitary life of complacency.

²⁰ “The Wrim” was an early novel draft written by Tyler Whitesides, one of my best friends, who is currently an author. He wrote “The Wrim” when we were both still in our teens, and the book very clearly didn’t hold enough water to make it past the initial attempt. However, Ty is still one of the greatest influences over my career and this story, and though I never actually played Dungeons and Dragons with him, we played games of imagination incredibly similar. As I included real names of my role-playing associates earlier, I figured this to be a good place for a final layer of tribute.

The other leads back into the building, to the fight you chose, to those you've fought alongside, and potentially to your doom.

A word of advice, to aid you in your choice.

Chuck,

Congratulations. You've finally opened the chest. Not exactly the same treasure that was in here when we were kids, but I don't think that keys to my comic collection would help you much now.

I can't come back to you, Chuck. Not now. I don't know if I ever will be able to. To be honest, I'm not sure if I want you to let me go and move on, or if your hope inspires me to keep going. I worry that I've used the last of my powers to get this message to you. But that's not important right now. What is important, is that you are thinking about giving up on everything we fought for.

I could tell you the pain eventually fades, that at some point it gets easier and better, but it doesn't. The challenge is finding the through line of goodness that runs through existence. The hard times don't have to be bad times, Chuck. Maybe the purpose of existence is to find a way to live the hard times while not losing sight of hope and joy.

True strength is allowing yourself to encounter the hopelessness and despair, and still move forward. The only choice we have is how we orient ourselves to the inevitable storms of existence.

I didn't come back because I don't want you to make this choice for me, or for us. I want you to do it because you believe in it. The choice is yours. Once you walk out that door, you are free to do what you think is best. If you want to run, I won't stop you. But you have the choice to go back and fight for what you know to be right.

Every moment counts. Every life counts. All of it counts. Inside you've got a voice that is constantly whispering that you can be better than you are. Now it's time to prove that to yourself.

P.S. You didn't have to read the whole letter out loud to unlock the door. Just the opening part. But I miss hearing your voice sometimes. Choose well.

M stands, still. He crosses to the door, twists the knob, finding it unlocked, and pushes it slightly open. He waits by it. He stands, frozen. He turns, his eyes returning to the table. He crosses back to the table, picking up the dice.

The Mace of the Wrim²¹ doubles your damage against all fiends. I go back to the room, and cast a banishing smite against the demon lord. Critical hit. 23... 73 points of damage. The demon is weak to holy damage. The mace doubles that again. That's... 292 points of damage. The demon lord is banished back to the Abyssal Plane. Then I cast Raise Dead on my friends.

He throws the dice, looks at the result, determined, then picks up his mask, and walks with purpose out of the room. Lights out.

²¹ In earlier editions of the script, Chuck seemed to pull a victory at the end of the script from nowhere, allowing him to be able to conquer the demon lord with seemingly no outside intervention, simply by making up his mind to do so and applying a very commonly used spell within the game. This constantly read as rather stupid to me. If he knew he could do that, why hadn't he to begin with? So, for final versions, I introduced an item into the chest which significantly heightened his powers, allowing him to find an increase of ability enough to be able to overcome the demon.

3.3 PERFORMANCE, RECEPTION AND FEEDBACK

This chapter will discuss the performances themselves, as well as feedback and reactions to them. The performances themselves were interesting and distinct, allowing for a wide range of response and experience for both myself and my audiences.

Coming into the first night my emotions were running high. It had been a stressful week, trying not only to get my own show together, but additionally working to try to polish the technical elements of other people's projects as well.

Fortunately, again, many of the last-minute criticisms from my alpha viewers, mixed together with a few last key elements of given circumstance work, especially the aforementioned switch in the powers my character had, allowed for a very specific and detailed first showing.

The key moment to that night's performance went was the specificity of my moment before, the imaginary events that occur in the character's life immediately before entering the playing space. This involved taking the time to imagine being pursued by people who have my demise in mind, using my powers to stave them off, running through a door, and finding myself in the basement room. Specifically, this allowed an immediate buy in to the situation I was running into. That preparation launched things very well, emphasizing the idea that I had a positive choice to make, that there were people I cared about who needed me, and that, by the end, I wanted to do what I could to help them.

To make an arbitrary comparison, I would say that this was my "best" performance. The truth of what I was living and feeling on stage were the clearest and real to me. The logic of the piece flowed well, the needs and the activities on stage being motivated and clear, my actions being driven to allow me to escape my purgatory. This was especially resonant during the last moments of the piece. While playing emotions themselves is counterproductive in acting, keeping a specific and meaningful action or "doing" allows for moments of needed emotional

weight to resonate. It was a great temptation through my piece, as is often the case in any piece, to try to force the emotions. However, the first night's performance rang true. I had given myself the advantage of having specific physical activities to accomplish, which allowed me to avoid constantly analyzing my acting, but instead to be engaged in solving my problems. This led to an emotionally full and impactful journey for me through the acting of the piece.

Beyond simply the acting of the piece, the other elements, which could have caused havoc to my concentration or storytelling, all worked. There was a great concern on my end about the consistency of the technical elements, especially the needed sound and light cues that represented Rose's communication with me. Missing them would be the technical equivalent of a scene partner forgetting their lines, and with the limiting nature of a solo piece, there's only so much I could do to compensate. However, there were no notable technical issues that interfered with the performance. The dice rolled well, the empty Dr. Pepper cans stayed upright, and things just clicked.

In comparison to this, my second performance fell victim to the classic second night lull, which many plays tend to go through. The adrenaline of the opening performance is lacking, and because of this, finding the same intensity in performance and emotion is more difficult. In addition, there is an additional temptation to try to chase a repeat of the performance from the night before. When things go incredibly well, you want, naturally, for them to go that well again. This can lead to a degree of forcing the acting, squeezing for additional meaning, and eventually a stifling of the truth on stage due to an increased tension and constantly self-analyzing a performance.

While those considerations were not detrimental at all, there was a conscious amount of my prep time that went to trying to compensate for them, which then proceeded to begin a bit of

a domino effect up to the beginning of the performance. I made a mental note at the start of my prep, as I was setting up my table with the characters and dice, that I would need consciously to allow myself simply to be where I was. Further, I'd need to let go of my expectations and allow the performance, likewise, to be what it was going to be. There was a reminder to trust the work, the preparation, and the training.

Trusting all that became especially tricky very early in the process, when a knock on the table dropped one of the figurines that was covering the reveal of the key at the end of the play. While I knew that I was going to find the key eventually, there was something about seeing it lying on the table that was jarring enough that took my out of my circumstances. For just a moment, I had to scramble to figure out if the audience had seen the key as well and what that could possibly mean for the rest of the performance. While it was only a momentary change, it definitely affected the moment-to-moment work of the play itself, even just temporarily.

The distraction was not completely detrimental, however. The piece still went well, and there were some additional moments of growth and clarity that came during this performance, which were different and stronger than the first night. However, I did find myself falling into the classic actor trap of "playing the end of the play." I knew that I had to get angry and worked up about being stuck, and instead of honestly and truthfully pursuing my objectives through the scene, I found myself channeling the resentment and anger at the piece falling down through the performance. This led to a hero who was angry and moody, and to my view, someone who wasn't as sympathetic as I would have liked.

This isn't to say that I was displeased with the second night's showing. As I stated, the first performance was definitely the most successful synthesis of my craft, but I was happy with both events for differing reasons. The unique opportunity within the theatre to have to repeat a

scene in different moments and even on different days will always lead to differing results. Trying to force a performance to be identical every single time it is performed is turning your back on the humanity that is essential to the storytelling that occurs. People are different moment-to-moment, and even more different day to day. To deny those changes and whitewash our experience to a bland predictability is counter to what I believe acting and art should be.

I was also able to take the show and perform it at my alma mater, in Logan, Utah, at the Caine Performance Hall, for a group of family and friends there. The piece had rested for a few weeks, and returning to a script that I had written yielded interesting results. I made a few last minute revisions at this point, mostly changes to phrasing and continuity, but nothing massive. A few items of note from that performance:

It was interesting to see how much a change of venue affected the way that the piece worked. Moving out of the black box style studio theater on LSU's campus to an acoustically masterful concert performance hall was a very large change. However, it was also a good and firm reminder that though the outside elements may change, the core of the craft remains the same. While yes, there are distinct differences in how much support and effort is required to fill the space with sound, that doesn't change what is happening in the life of the character. It's still asking yourself "What is happening now?" and "What do I want?" The actual playing of the scene doesn't change from a small black box to a multi-million dollar music facility.

It was additionally interesting to work with different technical collaborators. The Caine Performance Hall is by far the more technologically advanced of the two venues, which allowed for a greater variety of possibilities in the interactions with lights and sound. However, in the limited time I had available, it became evident that exploring all those options wasn't going to be possible, leading to the same cues being programmed in at both locations. However, there were

still subtle changes that ended up being an interesting different seasoning on the recipe of my performance. The lights at LSU were all long fades (meaning that the fades took half a second or so to arrive at full lighting, or dim to their needed level.) This came by virtue of the nature of the lighting instruments used, and it had previously worked very well as the visual method by which Rose communicated. However, upon arrival in Logan, I quickly realized that the lights, rather than making a half second fade up or down, would instead make the change almost instantly.

This translated to a change in the way that Rose was “delivering her lines.” Instead of subtle hints, and fading in and out, the sound and lights became an abrupt yes or no, instantly conveying in an earnestness and curtness, which was different from the previous iterations. It was a wonderful exercise to go through, in that one of the great focuses for my piece was an attempt to incorporate Meisner work into my piece. With that in mind, if my scene partner changed the way they were being with me it would, of necessity, change my way of being with them. This happened repeatedly in the performance. The reaching for dice was more earnest and quick. The feel of a rush, of worry and a level of panic from Rose influenced the way that I handled solving my problem. It was subtle, and very few people there would have known, especially without some measure of comparison by having seen an additional performance, but it was very much a new and exciting element to the piece.

Finally, it was a much friendlier audience base in Logan. I say this mainly because a large portion of those in attendance was those with whom I had played my role-playing games through the years. Brady, Travis, and Ty Whitesides (a major collaborator) were all present, as were many of the others from over the years. The jokes landed a lot harder, and the intricacies of the game were understood on a level that they hadn’t been fully in other performances. This added

an additional amount of buy in on the part of the audience, which only further fed my own energies on stage.

Overall, it was a worthwhile and fulfilling performance.

The response for my piece was generally very warm and accepting. There was an interest in the work, in the story, and in the nuances of the performance itself. I would not say that it was nearly as wide reaching as I would egotistically like to pretend, but there was an engagement there.

Fortunately, enough, I was also aware that I was writing for a bit of a niche market, and to those who fell within my target demographic, things were wonderful. There was constant talk of the intricacies of the game itself, the truthfulness behind the moves and strategies. There was a wonderful and general feeling of nostalgia from several of the older patrons who had had experiences with table top RPG's in their past. My uncle, who saw the show in Utah, was a major contributor to opening the doors for me to encounter this world. He was the first to tell me about Dungeons and Dragons, he gave me my first video game console, and has been a wonderful mentor and friend to me through my life. His comments were praising, making a distinct note of pointing out how interesting it was to watch he and his wife (who has no roleplaying experience) watch the same show. While she was attentive, engaged, and interested, there was an additional amount of depth that came up with the references and truth of the actual game that was happening on the stage that was simply beyond her grasp. He made a particular note that that additional understanding wasn't necessary to enjoy the piece, but noted how much more full it seemed to him alongside it. He was also incredibly impressed by the incorporation of the technical elements as Rose's communication, being clear that it worked for him to buy into the relationship, and that there was clearly a scene partner on stage.

Those comments were additionally supported by comments from several members of my faculty at Utah State University who were able to see the show. I give their feedback initial mention here because they were the last to see a great deal of my work before I began my graduate studies. They also have not been able to follow the progress and growth I've experienced here. This was the litmus test for my overall progression during my time at LSU, in my mind. I was relieved to find out that my improvement was notable.

One of my great mentors, and the man who had originally introduced me to the Meisner technique, was incredibly complimentary in his feedback, complimenting my growth and change as an actor during my time away from my undergraduate. He was especially insistent that there is a greater level of truth and nuance to my acting, which previously hadn't been present.

That specific feedback served as a bit of a capstone to my master's education. Upon arriving in school, I was very good at exactness in my performances. I've mentioned several times that the humanity and variability that comes in acting is where the truth of our craft lies. After graduating from my undergraduate program, I was very good at faking that. During our first play at Swine Palace, several of the other MFA's commented on my ability to repeat with exactness every moment that happened. My line deliveries were the same, the inflection patterns exact, and very little could shake my carefully planned and prepared presentation. I had consistently received the feedback and notes that my performances were lacking in specificity and nuance before in my career, which had always previously lead me to try harder to plan around what would happen and prepare the best presentation of my lines even more. This, in turn, lead to the same note again. I entered graduate school with the express intention of helping to solve that specific issue. Through my two years here, I have found a change in my artistry that comes from embracing the now. While I still find myself occasionally caught up in the pre-

planned, I have discovered and found an awareness of what it really feels like to be truthful on stage. I've found what being present with someone else in a scene can be, the duel of energies and strategies constantly changing how you are being with each other.

Another one of my undergraduate professors was also incredibly forward in stating that he had absolutely no idea what was happening on that stage. He added, however, that a complete and full knowledge wasn't necessary. In fact, any knowledge wasn't necessary. As long as there was someone up on the stage truthfully telling their story and living, it becomes relatable for an audience to watch. This was a perfect example of that, in his eyes.

I also had very positive feedback from friends at LSU. There were wonderful compliments given on the depth and truth of the piece, of its simultaneous complicated nature and the simplicity by which it delivered its message, of the range and depth that was required of me in the acting.

Accompanying these positive comments, however, were a few very truthful criticisms. While my feedback in the Baton Rouge area was also positive, a great deal of the thing I heard, particularly from my professors, was encouragement on how to move forward and continue to better myself within the piece, and as an artist in general.

This was not a piece for everyone, and there were many who tuned out a bit because of the subject matter. I could have told this story in another way and made it more generally accessible or found some way to open it up more. However, in the time I had, I felt this would have compromised my artistic vision, so I avoided it. Were I to remount or, especially, expand this piece, I would make sure to workshop with those unfamiliar with the subject a lot more to try and make it as relatable as possible.

This also was not an incredibly difficult or stretching role for me to play from an acting perspective. As far as acting difficulties, it stayed very much on the safe side of the river. While difficulty was not a requirement within the criteria for the thesis itself, there was a bit of a feeling from others and myself that I might have been able to serve myself as an artist better with a bit deeper of a challenge. For future options, I would love to turn this into a one-man show featuring a team, asking a greater amount of flexibility and range from me as I represent multiple characters on stage.

Finally, however, I did want to cover the holistic response to the piece, which not only includes enjoyment and understanding, and both compliment and criticism, but a look at the reception of the message of the piece itself.

While there may be a few other stories worth going into, one in particular stuck out to me. It may not be representative of every experience, but I don't personally feel it needs to be. After the performance in Logan, I had a very good and old friend of mine who approached me at the post show reception in the lobby. She had driven from her home an hour away to be there, which was a surprise to me, but I was very excited she could make it. She said that she thoroughly enjoyed the show and my acting in it. As we continued to speak, however, I discovered that she was going through an incredibly rough time in her life. Her father had been diagnosed with early stage pancreatic cancer. She was in recovery from a knee surgery and taking paid time off from a job that she was worried wasn't going to be fulfilling for her much longer. She also had recently been diagnosed with severe depression, which was only exacerbated by all the many other issues in her live. In very blunt terms, she explained to me how much things in her life were the worst that she could remember. At that point, she then looked at me and asked if I would send her a copy of the letter that I read at the end of the play,

because she said it was something that she had needed to hear that day. I agreed quickly, and forwarded her the letter, as well as my notes from Andrew W.K.'s presentations. I have been keeping tabs on her since, and the overarching message of hope from my play has seems to have bolstered her in her life. I can't speak in absolutes here, but it was humbling and amazing to know that my piece served to help someone in a time where they stood in need of it.

That was the point, in my mind, and had been a central focus of what I was trying to accomplish through the piece. As I continue to reflect on what I was able to write, create, and act in this piece, that central concept has permeated every level of what I made. Even the choice to write about the subject matter that I did was motivated by this desire for representation of a group of people with whom I relate and wish could see themselves in art.

CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION

In reflection on my time in graduate school, and particularly on the events surrounding my thesis, I returned to reasons for attending graduate school in the first place. I began seeking for graduate level training to help shore up what I viewed as my shortcomings as an actor. These were, in no particular order, my lack of nuance and variability, an incomplete understanding and usage of vocal techniques, and an awkwardness in my own physical body. Graduate school, for me, was a way to try and shore up those weaknesses and hone my acting abilities. It would follow, then, that the best way to try and evaluate the efficacy of my training and my growth during my time at LSU would be to look at those areas and note any growth or progression that happened.

Physically I found this piece very revealing. At least from my perspective, a lot of the tensions and awkwardness that had been hallmark to my previous work before graduate training were lessened or had disappeared. There was a level of comfortability and ease that I was able to find in this character which was very different from many of the characters I'd ever played before. I found the ability to work from a neutral place, and then color that with conscious physical choices. This came as a welcome relief to the habitual practice of being a slave to the tensions which had controlled a great deal of my acting in many previous roles.

Vocally as well I found myself in a much different place than when I had begun my training. Through instruction which was directly catered to my methods of learning, I felt a greater range and ability which I hadn't previously had. There was a level of ease and control to my voice which I applied to this piece. While I haven't vanquished my vocal demons, or mastered the craft yet, I feel that my performances here gave me a great feel of the nuance and sustainability which I had been looking for in my vocal training. My voice felt like it was

flexible and able to rise to the demands I put on it, rather than restricting me to the limits of its ability.

Finally in this progression, I definitely feel my acting is in a significantly different place than when I entered my training here. As I had stated previously, a great deal of my acting when I arrived at LSU was mechanical and wooden, full of memorized responses and a set cadence to line delivery. My training here lead to a release of my breath, a softening of tensions, and most importantly, a surrender of myself to the “now.” I gave up the planned, clean, and well thought out versions of my performances, and worked towards trying instead to simply responds to what is happening around me. While I recognize that I still have room to grow here, including a habbit of “pulling my own emotional strings,” I absolutely think that I am leaving as a more versatile and nuanced actor than when I arrived. This was evident within my piece specifically, simply because the moment to moment work changed. My reactions were different during every performance. Not substantially different, but a difference enough to acknowledge the fact that every performance is going to be different, because an exact copy of a performance is impossible. Every day brings different things, and the actor is in a different place, as much as we may want to try and force it. Rather than fighting it, I gained a love for accepting the differences of every performance, and allowing the small, subtle changes to affect my work. To put this differently, I learned to love the nuance of performances, fulfilling, in part, the last of my goals.

Beyond the techniques of acting, I also learned an increased love for humanity, as I continued what I consider to be an intensive study of the motivations that make us all move forward in existence. I’m amazed at the capacity of human beings to learn and adapt. That has been one of the greatest take-aways from graduate school and my experiences here, both in the

classroom, on stage, and even living in Baton Rouge during the tumultuous social and political times over the past two years. I've learned so much about myself and acting, but equally as much, I believe, about the human condition and what makes us all tick.

I spent a great deal of my teenage years being made fun of for my interests and the things I enjoyed. Theater was both a solace and a curse in that regard. Within the theater and on stage I found a place where I could be whatever I wanted, and a community that supported me for who I was. However, this also came with the stigma that tends to surround the theater, especially in the minds of many teenagers today. My Saturdays spent at Mystic Comics, playing Magi-Nation and Heroclix before returning to Scott Chamber's house with Brady to play video games for the evening were the norm for me, and I felt at times during my teenage years that I needed to hide that somehow. I spent a great deal of time fighting to be comfortable simply expressing interest in the things I liked. I felt guilty, at times, because the things that made me happy or that I was good at weren't the things that were popular or held in high regard.

I've continued to move forward and have assumed the roles of both actor and creative artist, however, I've realized that I'm not uniquely equipped to help to continue a movement that has started of late. Recently, the nerd culture, which I had once been part of, has come to the forefront of popular culture. Movies and television shows featuring my favorite characters and stories from comics are being made constantly. My favorite books are now some of the most successful series of all times. The things I once enjoyed in secrecy are now common place and appreciated for what they are. And, to my surprise, there seem to be many others who were living in seclusion before this cultural revolution. In a social push I consider to be quite wonderful, we're finally starting to allow people to simply enjoy the things that make them happy, find joy in the experiences of life, and not worry about judgement by living the way they

feel like they should, providing they're not actually hurting anyone else in the process. Esports is exploding onto the scene. The internet has allowed for niche interest groups to find each other and collaborate. There are so many steps being taken in the right direction, moving toward acceptance and support of each other as human beings. To quote my little brother, Evan, "You don't have to understand why a thing is interesting to people to be happy for someone accomplishing something great in it." (Rasmussen, 2016)

It's that central idea that both drove this solo performance, and is what has been the most fulfilling thing about this project to me. I saw many of my friends who have never seen or enjoyed theater before watch someone do something on stage that told their story, and they found an appreciation for it. I had younger members of my audience see that and get excited about participating in theater and the arts because of it. There is nothing I want more than to be able to use my art to help people who haven't appreciated the art form before find something relatable in it, but to encourage people to be unafraid to live their lives in the way they find the most hopeful and joyous. I've long had a dream of being able, someday, to point to my own life and the things I've had to go through, to where I am now, and be able to say to someone struggling with the same trials that it gets better. I've learned that it's valuable for everyone to feel represented, and that it's worth fighting for representation and a voice for anyone. As I continue in what I intend to be a lifelong pursuit of this craft, in creating and expressing and acting, and as I continue to hone my skills and the techniques of this craft, I want to do my utmost in order to facilitate that realization for growth for any and all, both from inside the craft itself, and in life.

In the end, it's about hope. The idea that life, by default, has to be good, because if we didn't exist, then we wouldn't have the chance to experience anything. It's about learning to deal with the low points in life, while relishing in the high ones. It's about not numbing yourself to

the experiences which are to be found, but learning to love them. Even further, it's about understanding, loving, and accepting the experiences that others have gone through as being as valid and important as your own. It's an inward admission that long as you're working toward being the best version of yourself you can, and constantly striving to seek out the best life has to offer you, that it's worth it. And when you're in a position to encourage and lift along the way, then there's joy to be found in doing that too.

REFERENCES

Rasmussen, Evan, @Evan_Raz “You don't have to understand why a thing is interesting to people to be happy for someone accomplishing something great in it.” 11 Jul 2016, 2:34 pm. Tweet. Web.

W.K., Andrew, @AndrewWK, “PARTYING = a simple word describing the physical expression of a state mind in which you're deeply aware of how incredible it is to exist.” 25 Jan 2017, 2:05 pm. Tweet. Web.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Essay/Experimental Super Hero Monologue from Summer 2016

The Making and Breaking of a Hero

Here's the deal. I'm special. Not exclusively special. But I'm... different. I'm sure that takes you completely by surprise at this point. Mask, costume, logo, all of it. I'm not exactly trying to hide anything at this point.

See? It's a sandwich. BLT. I eat them. Just like a normal person. But of course I'm not normal. I walk around wearing a mask and fighting evil. But you don't get to see this side of me often. The sandwich side of me. The healing up in my house for weeks because of a fight that I took a few too many punches in. The neighbors calling the cops at night because they happen to catch a glimpse of some guy sneaking into my place wearing a mask and their concerned about the neighborhood.

I get it. I mean, I have to get it. The draw of being a superhero. I mean, I am one, so of course I get it. The picture we get in the comics and movies is so amazing, so inspirational, so absolutely clean cut in their morality.

And I suppose this is where you think I'm going to say "but things are a lot grayer than that" right? Because that's somewhere pop culture has already taken you. The role of the anti-hero, the

Deadpools, Punishers, and Wolverines of the world. People who do good things, but you wouldn't qualify as necessarily heroic. Naw, it's not all Clark Kents.

But that's not my story either.

But let's talk probability for a minute. Powers are rare. Like, fantastically rare. And for some reason the stories everyone hears are of powers that are incredibly potent. Mind control, telepathy, super strength, flight. Those are the people you hear about. But there's so many more "powers" out there. The "I played basketball in middle school" to the NBA caliber powers that exist out there. For every Hulk that exists, there's a few hundred "guy who cries mega-tears" and his astounding sidekick "I can change the color of plastics by touching them, but only at night-man"

So finding someone of true potential impact from a power perspective on society is rare enough. Then we have to have the stars of existence align to keep them alive long enough to learn that they have powers, then learn to use their powers, and then run the gauntlet of contemporary morality and come down on the side of truth and justice, and all while deciding it's worth the risk fighting against those as powerful, if not more so, than you are.

Hopefully you can see the attrition rate here.

So for every hero you could name, I could find you thousands who haven't made the cut. It's a brutal industry, really. Job security is crap. Pay is even worse. But for some reason, there's a few of us who have a moment where we decide that we need to something bigger than ourselves.

My moment began in traffic.

See something weird happens to people when they start to drive. Not when they just drive, but especially when they drive. Let me lay the scene. It's a three lane section of an interstate. The right lane is an exit only lane. Fairly self-explanatory, no?

Here's the issue, though. Traffic is clogged up around where the exit is for some reason, and it's starting to back up in the two lanes that don't have to exit the freeway.

So what do you do? You sit in those two lanes, and ride traffic out. The right lane quickly becomes empty because it's clearly marked "exit only" and those needing to exit can simply drive away.

But that's not how it happens.

And that's the problem.

Geniuses. These super intelligent people. They have an in. They're so smart. They can see a solution that the rest of the poor ignorant people on the road can't.

I can just drive in the right lane and then merge in at the end and skip all the traffic.

BRILLIANT, RIGHT?

LOOK AT THESE IDIOTS CHOOSING TO SIT IN TRAFFIC ALL DAY THE SUCKERS.

We'll come back to those guys. But here's where the trouble comes up.

Backwards traveling waves.

It's math at this point. It's science. It's proven.

Traffic is caused, most the time, by someone pushing on their brakes and slowing down.

I want you to image that. You are driving down a road. The car in front of you brakes. Your trained reaction is what? That you now brake as well. But you can't just brake for a little bit of time. You have to break long enough to determine that they are no longer braking. Which means, inherently, that you're going to be braking for a longer amount of time than they are.

So you can see the exponential growth, right?

Pretty soon this can halt traffic completely. And all it takes is one person braking, with enough cars around them to start it.

Now we go back to our genius traffic skirter, those who are so much smarter than the rest of us saps wasting our time in traffic. They hop in the exit only lane, drive to the front of the line, throw their signal on, and force their way into the front of the line, thereby relieving themselves of the stress of sitting in that horrible waiting mess, because wherever they're driving to get to is so much more important than every other person on that road.

And guess what happens when they merge back into the middle lanes after driving in the exit lane?

That's right.

The car allowing them in has to brake. Causing the car behind that one to brake more, and the wave of braking travels backwards, growing in mass and size till it consumes the whole road.

The people jumping the line are causing the traffic. Their need to get to get to Walmart because they're out of Diet Coke means that they're entitled to skip the grind, and perpetuate it, because they're so much more intelligent than the rest of us.

And as I sat in my commute one day, sitting behind the wheel of my car, watching this happen, I realized that these people need to be stopped.

Not the people in traffic. But the people in society who take the proverbial exit lane only to merge back onto the metaphorical highway of life having not had to endure the hardships of the real world, while simultaneously perpetuating the very problems that they themselves have never had to face.

So there I had it. Origin story. I then decided to be a superhero.

And I know what you're thinking. Where did the amazing powers come from, your ability to fight crime and evil more than that of an ordinary man? But, at least for me, that's not the origin story that matters. Because every super villain also has powers of some way, and they obviously aren't heroes. So the powers don't matter. They're meaningless when it comes to defining you, without the accompanying origin story of deciding to be a hero.

Mine just happened to be road rage.

Besides, I'm not even sure where my powers came from. Parents are normal, normal life, no exposure to radiation or magic that I know of. Haven't taken the time to turn myself over to the authorities for full genetic testing yet, but I'm a busy guy. At some point in my life I realized that I could copy other people, but like for real. I'd watch a guy deadlift 400 lbs, and I'd say I wanted to try, and I could do it. Then I'd see a guy playing a piano super well. Got that as well. Couldn't do it the next day, of course. And only one person at a time. Limited by distance, as well as duration, after that it's a lot of specifics I've managed to work out that really aren't all that

important to you. Comes with a few quirky side effects as well. I tend to get a pretty good mental picture of the people I'm stealing abilities from. Equal and opposite reactions, you know? I get their ability; it comes with a glimpse into their psyche. That may be the hardest part. But I'll get to that.

So now I'm here, with a decision to be a hero. Great.

Now I have to do that.

No one ever tells you how much goes into simply starting out at heroing. In the movies it's all montage and music, a few frames of comic, and you're there! Full blown hero!

A lot of people think that the name comes first and easily. But it doesn't. Nope. Not for me. I didn't even have the benefit of a cool story to accompany my powers to really fill in the details. So I get to try to shoehorn my way into a name based on no actual heroic experiences at all? And then it's a mind game of "do I do it or do I let the media do it later when I do awesome things and is it the right thing and who do I tell?" All of the sudden I'm my own publicist, and PR firm.

A mess.

And then there's the DESIGN side of things. Holy crap, the designs I've had to do. Costume, logo, persona, all of it. I wore a standard black mask from Party City for so long. That's terrible! But I don't know graphic design! I don't know costume design! I have no idea about the

differences in fabrics and how to sew. And it's not like I happen to luckily know some guy who used to be a tailor for the NSA who can make me a bulletproof suit that happens to fit my specific power set that I don't even have a name for yet.

Because life doesn't actually happen that way. Super powers are rare enough as it is! How many of those individuals also happen to be connected to the exact person who they would need to build them a wardrobe to fight crime in?

And that's another problem! The whole fighting thing! Sure, I can walk into a room, steal the fighting ability of the person who I assess to be the best fighter there, but if I walk into a room full of minions with no actual abilities, I'm screwed. So now I'm not only working PR, but now I have to be a designer, a tailor, and a master level martial artist. And I also am expected to maintain a secret identity, because of the whole "villains will kill everyone important to me if they know who I really am" bit.

Do you know how hard that is? Maintaining complete anonymity in today's world? I mean, they can trace my location on a cell phone from space. There's facial and voice recognition out there that can nail me as soon as I open my mouth. I'm not loaded. So purchasing thousands of dollars worth of equipment to keep hidden isn't exactly in my budget.

Those are the things that the glorified world portrayed in today's world just skip over.

Everyone's a billionaire philanthropist or an alien or someone who has everything fall together in the perfect way that everything is just neatly tied up.

And that doesn't even begin to touch my personal life. That's all the stuff I do for the non-paying trying to save a life and/or the world job.

Not easy.

And no one tells you about the emotional load. The piece of everyone that comes into my brain when I copy their powers.

Appendix B: Love letter/Experimental Monologue from Summer 2016

Hi.

I know.

I can't not talk to you though. I've been needing to talk to you for years. And even at the times I've had a chance I've been stupid enough to pretend I was fine and that things were ok.

7 years. I actually read a study the other day that if you have a friendship or relationship last 7 years then it's going to last for a lifetime. I can't imagine that, though, because a lifetime of this isn't what I want.

I've told you before, I think. At least I've told myself I've told you before. But there has never been anyone in my life who I have found myself more connected with than you. It actually scares me a bit. Sometimes I swear that I can feel you. That sounds crazy. And it's probably just a result of my not knowing how to handle... us. What we are. Or aren't. Because to be honest, I've never quite known.

What really bothered me the most for all those years was not knowing. Because I felt like I knew. At least, I knew for me, and I felt like I knew for you. But then you disappeared. And I couldn't tell anymore. And I sat, and watched, and waiting, wishing that there was something

more that I could do or say. I was ready to knock on your door and tell you that I needed you. But I was terrified that I'd find you there and you'd just look at me and turn away.

And then you're back. Out of the blue. And you're back too late. Or you're back at the right time for what you were going for. And then a year later I finally hear from you that I had been right all along. That what I thought was there was there and that I was so stupid to doubt what in my gut is still one of the surest things I've ever felt.

And here we are. At a complete. Because you seem so happy. And I'm happy. But... I can't let go of what you were to me. No. I don't like that past tense. What you are to me.

I've never been so confused in my entire life.

You have no idea how much of an impact you've had on me. Everything I've done I feel. Every choice, every chance, every *thing*, I feel has had a bit of you in it. I look around and everything reminds me of you. It's stupid, and juvenile, and I would write it off but it's persisted for 2,500 days. And I can't shake it.

And all I did was hold your hand. Hug you once. Had our knees touch at a late night restaurant after a day's work. We couldn't be what we wanted to then either, because of me. I wasn't available, and... well you didn't believe I was going to be, and rightfully so. Maybe that's why you left. Maybe you thought with you out of the picture I'd be able to get my act together. But that's what you don't understand.

You were a revelation to me. You were a bright light that showed me the fact that the path I was on didn't lead where I thought it would. You made me realize that I could have everything I wanted to, because it existed. Before you, before "us" I thought things were going to simply be impossible, that settling was what this world was about. But it's not. And while you may have helped me to realize that you were not the reason things fell apart for me.

But why did you have to leave? And why couldn't I find you. I tried, in the ways I thought might work. I made attempt after attempt. They were stupid. Do you want to team up on a project? Do you want to get together to catch up? Anything. And I was yelling into an empty void.

And now here we are.

The only reason I let myself move on, the only reason I allowed myself to even try to feel something beyond was because I had spent 3 years convincing myself that you were out of the picture completely, that you were never coming back. So I let myself move on.

And then I'm sitting on a bus one afternoon and I get a text.

You have no idea what that did to me. My stomach hit the floor, hard. And for weeks, WEEKS, I was in a weird funk. What did it mean? The timing made no sense. Why? Why then? And... why at all? I'd spent so much time thinking and justifying and convincing myself of all the reasons that you'd gone. And all of them were permanent. Because that's what I felt like.

All the sudden my armor cracks. The foundation I was building my life on tilts. I can't even think of a proper comparison, which is totally ironic all things considered. But maybe it's not even that. Maybe it's something new. Unknown. So I push forward. You're back! Just... different. Right.

Nope.

It's not different. Because of course it wouldn't be. Because inside. Inside I have something telling me something that I've never really experienced again.

And it goes against everything, I know. It goes against everything we stand for and society and all that but I just can't help but know... I.. why.

But then finally, after all those years, I find out that I was right. I've been right. All along. And you'd think that would come as a complete relief to me, but no. Because now the pain of the loss and missed opportunities comes into play.

There aren't words. I want to scream.

Appendix C: Essay/Experimental Monologue on Hope from Summer 2016

Why? That's the great question of all time I think. It's the root of all our curiosity, our exploration, our pain in some ways. We are creatures of reason, of logic. And at our core, we just want to know.

And that may be the most difficult thing about life. Because so much is unknown. We face it every day, every minute really. Questions about the unknown, unproven, and things beyond our scope to know or understand.

And that can be crushing. Especially when the things we take for certainties, the pillars of truth in our own lives are shaken. Ideas like the basic decency and goodness of mankind. We sit and stare as our perceptions of reality and what existence is about burn to the ground again and again. And then we're forced to rebuild, trying to take in this new concept that we'd previously not had to include in our world view.

So what keeps us going? The pattern can be exhausting, frustrating, even defeating. There are points in each of our lives where we run up against a wall of confusion and the unknown that may appear completely insurmountable.

Now, obviously, I can only speak from my experience and the observations I've made of others. But maybe, just maybe, we should take a step back and look at the bigger why?

Look, people want to be happy. We want to be comfortable. And we each try to find that happiness in whatever we've learned is the best way to get it. For some it's through their jobs, through their family, through hobbies and interests. But what you need to also take into consideration is that the homeless guy on the side of the road is also just doing what he can to be happy. The criminals, the drug traffickers and rapists, the terrorists, all of them are doing something to try to find some sort of lasting happiness for themselves. But they're all solving the problems of existence through a different way, based on the way they've experienced the world and life.

All of the sudden you're looking at humanity as not simply a bunch of people with agendas, but as simple people trying their hardest to find some sort of equilibrium in this world.

Now, I get that there's people out there doing things to find that happiness that are, to put it bluntly, wrong. They're bad. They hurt other people. And those shouldn't happen. But I can't help but look at their motivation and instead of getting angry, I get sad. This person, this criminal, had a life that lead them to the point where they were convinced that the thing they could do to bring themselves happiness is to kill another person, for whatever specific reason that may happen. God wants them to, or they have to defend their reputation or territory, or that person hurt them so bad it's the only option. But at its core it's because that person wants to be happy. They're desperately searching for hope; the same way we are.

I'm not saying this to justify their choices. What I'm saying is that maybe it can change our responses. Rather than responding to people as unchanging and unfeeling individuals, maybe it's

time we did what we can to help them understand that happiness can be achieved in different ways. And I know the arguments contrary to this. All the motivational movies make it look so cheery and easy and we all have these warm fuzzy feelings from them. But reality is different, we're told. Reality is hard, and we need to be hard right back in order to stay safe. But do we?

Maybe it's time that we stop trying to find reason why myself and my group should be happy at the expense of the happiness of others.

Maybe it's time to stop trying to devalue the good ways that other people find happiness simply because we aren't interested in them or don't understand them.

I was once told that "You don't have to understand why a thing is interesting to people to be happy for someone accomplishing something great in it."

Appendix D: Notes from Power of Positive Partying Tour by Andrew W.K.

Compiled October 13th 2016, at the Bunkhouse Saloon, Las Vegas, Nevada, and the
Manship Theater, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on October 31st 2016.

Las Vegas

1. Attained through a celebratory attitude
2. Being alive is about the greatest thing that can happen
3. You can never have a moment back
 - a. Why try to force that?
 - b. Develop the strength to accept the fullness of life
4. Mastery of partying is the ability to accept the hard
5. Transcendent part of partying is finding the through line of goodness in reality
6. We don't have answers. Like, we legitimately we don't know what life is.
7. The fact that we haven't found answers shouldn't discourage our pursuit of asking that question
8. Standing between us and knowing "why" is existence
9. Hard doesn't have to be bad
10. The pain doesn't leave
11. Pain makes the rewards worth it
12. Follow the souls growing pains, because they show you you're onto something worthwhile.
13. Let the hate pass. Give it time, and put EFFORT into squelching it
14. We're not required to like everyone and everything. But you can love them
15. Lesson learning is small and incremental

16. You have to be open to the experience
17. Mistakes are allowed to increase our strength, using it for growth. It's about growth and learning
18. It's easy to party when everything is great. It's during the difficult times that the theory gets tested
19. Our only choice is how we orient ourselves to the inevitable storms of existence
20. True party transcends reason. Fortunately, so does life
21. Any effort to be better than you are is worthwhile
22. Can I be a better version of myself and a better human being by doing this?
23. Become the best and highest version of yourself through your actions
24. Life is about empathy to the most extreme degree
25. A full-bodied embracement of the fact that just because you don't or haven't experienced something doesn't mean that someone else hasn't
26. Positivity is not directly tied to happiness. There's a distinct connection, but they are NOT synonyms.
27. What would I do if I was really the kind of person I want to be?
28. The pain of loss because of positivity is simply the inverted joy of our experience
29. We can't do the hard work of living for anyone else
30. We can cheer, and exchange genuine support and love
31. We really are all in this together
32. If they don't want your love, love them without their approval
33. Nothing will confirm your own beliefs more than understanding the opposite beliefs

34. It takes strength not to be threatened by those views, but to actively seek to find the humanity in those people who have them
35. Partying is activated gratitude
36. It all counts. If you party hard enough, it all counts
37. Life isn't easy. Partying shouldn't be
38. You have to be strong enough to be weak and vulnerable
39. Strength is allowing things in, and things inside to be seen
40. There's the puzzling questions that really aren't so puzzling. They just don't matter
41. Do not numb your experience
42. Can I turn this "lead" part of me into "gold"
43. How can I turn my "bad" parts into something worthwhile?
44. Stay close to joy, and use that pressure to propel you
45. You simply have to keep moving forward and discover the path you are going to walk
46. Follow the pull of hope
47. You have to be in the playing field so when creativity strikes you are there to receive and interact with it
48. I "KNOW" I can be better than I've been. It's about proving that to yourself
49. You have to rely on the inherent good of existence
50. It's about testing yourself, but more about enhancing our worthiness to exist
51. Stay close to joy
52. Studying counts as partying. Studying hard counts as partying hard.

Baton Rouge

51. Love your inner enemy
 - a. Party with your inner demons
52. Artistic expression breeds a unity and a trust
53. Life has to be good, because you find the pockets of joy
54. Some of the questions we don't have answers to. That's ok. There a sense of possibility through that
55. If you can party at the good times, you can make room to party at any time
56. We don't go to a party to have everything make sense. We go to have our minds blown
57. We like certainty. Life isn't going to give us that. Embrace the chaos of that idea
58. Just jump. Deal with the fallout later
59. You need to find the strength to embrace the entire spectrum of human experiences
60. Trying to find hope and happiness is the ultimate motivator
61. Ultimately, the inner flavor of the dread of the unknown may be the sign that we're actually alive
62. Use it as an inner power source to power your destiny, not electrocute yourself upon
63. You can MAKE life what you want
64. If you figured out what life was, maybe you'd quit moving forward
65. Life is paradoxical for that reason
66. Can we be worthy of getting to *be*?
67. We watch movies to watch people encounter their obstacles and let them make them who they are

68. It hurts because it's worth it. Existence has set it up that way
69. The pain of growth allows you to exceed yourself
70. You work out in the day to day gym of existence in order to handle the unexpected moments of needed lift
71. There isn't going to be a breakthrough that will alleviate our pain
Rather than spending energy to avoid it, embrace it
72. Make joy your centerpiece
73. Why can't the sensations that make life worth it be the purpose of life?
74. You can't take away the pain of someone else's struggle. You can be there, cheer them on, and love them
75. THIS, RIGHT NOW, COUNTS TOO
76. Quit trying to find moments that matter *more*
77. There something about putting yourself into another's problems and living them with them that can be healing
78. We listen to sad music to feel better as we have negative feelings join ours towards partying
79. Payoff of success through art far outweighs the detractions. It takes one person to make the difference, or receive the message
80. If you feel the motivation to move forward, lead with it and the rest is going to be confusing, but will pass
81. It is a privilege to engage in the arts. THAT YOU ARE WORTHY OF THAT
PRIVILEGE IS THE ONLY THING YOU HAVE TO PROVE.

82. We are in this life in pursuit of the sensation of life. Artists are gifted and privileged to be able to try and give that to others
83. The endless purpose of existence should spur you into action. Am I becoming who I would want myself to be?
84. You're fulfilling a chance to make the most of the opportunity you've been given
85. Humanity has a purpose. We are here to achieve something
86. Life is meant to be challenging. Do not run from it.
87. Make the world better by projecting your interior
88. We are driven to try to eliminate uncertainty. Why?
89. Just because we don't have answers doesn't mean there's not answers to know
90. Just lead from your heart and try to move forward
91. The nature of life is to always be becoming something
92. Existence by nature is always moving
93. We use the bad mood when it propels us towards goodness. We withdraw it when it distracts. Just discard it.
94. The bad times can bring out our best or our worst. You get a choice in that process
95. The ability to choose whether the glass is half full or empty is a gift
96. The message of partying will be heard by those listening for it

Appendix E: Lyrics to *The Unicorn Invasion of Dundee*,
from *Tales of the Kingdom of Fife*, by Gloryhammer.

They came with the first light of dawn
Setting their sights on Dundee
Led by the sorcerer Zargothrax
Slaying all people he sees
They ride to war on once noble beasts
Corrupted by wizard spell
The unicorns used to be good
Now they are forced to serve hell

Down from the mountains
And across the river Tay
An army of undead unicorns
Are riding into the fray

Fireballs and lightning are raining from the sky
Chaos and bloodshed while all the people die
In this epic battle begins the final war
Tragedy will strike this day, prepare thee for
The unicorn invasion of Dundee

The townspeople had little hope
They were not ready for war
Fireballs make everybody die
And buildings collapse to the floor
The beautiful princess was raped
And taken prison with cry
Angus McFife swears a mighty oath
"I will make Zargothrax die!"

The forces of darkness
Are invading proud Dundee
There must find a hero
To save its destiny

Appendix F: Lyrics from *Victory Strikes Again* and *Long Live the Party*

from *The Wolf*, by Andrew W.K.

This is why we are alive

We all live like we are going to die

We are here, We are high

And this is why we love to live our lives

~

I want to have a party

I want to have a party

I want to have a party

I want to have a party

You cannot kill the party

You cannot kill the party

You cannot kill the party

Long Live The Party

I want to have a party

I want to have a party

I want to have a party

I want to have a party

You cannot kill the party

cannot kill the party

cannot kill the party

cannot kill the party

Long Live the Party

Do you care, what you are?

Where's your pride?

We don't know

But we don't wonder why

I want to have a party

I want to have a party

I want to have a party

I want to have a party

You cannot kill the party

You cannot kill the party

You cannot kill the party

Long Live The Party

I want to have a party

I want to have a party

I want to have a party

I want to have a party

You cannot kill the party

You cannot kill the party

You cannot kill the party

Long Live The Party

The conquest will survive

The more that you can give it, then the more it will be
And if you do not have it, you can take it from me
All we ever wanted was a thing to believe,
And now that we have found it, we have all that we need.
The more that you can give it, then the more it will be
And if you do not have it, you can take it from me
All we ever wanted was a thing to believe,
And now that we have found it, we have all that we need.
We have found our pride.

VITA

Lance Rasmussen, a native of Logan, Utah, was raised on the theatre, and spent his childhood summer vacation on family trips to the Utah Shakespeare Festival. Inspired by this to pursue a career in acting, he received his BFA in Acting from the Caine College of the Arts at Utah State University. To facilitate advancement and further training in his craft, he entered graduate school in the School of Theatre at Louisiana State University. He expects to graduate in May of 2017, and continue to pursue his career as an actor.